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DEATH AND ASCENT IN LING-PAO TAOISM [1]

Stephen R. Bokenkamp
The University of Tennessee

– Introduction –

A. C. Graham, in his excellent work on the Chuang-tzu text, finds occasion to voice a sentiment that is still shared by a number of sinologists. "It is a fascinating irony of intellectual history," he writes, "that the label 'Taoism' came to apply both to a philosophy which demands before anything else reconciliation to the natural cycle of life and death, to the decay of the body and the loss of personal identity, and to magical, religious or proto-scientific measures for reversing the spontaneous course of biological process to fulfil the most unrealistic of our hopes, to live forever."[2] The fallacy of this characterization lies in its easy assumptions concerning the natural and the spontaneous. Graham's irony dissolves once we realize that the Taoists of "magical, religious, or proto-scientific measures" harboured radically different ideas of natural process than that engaged by the authors of the Chuang-tzu, while both groups would have trouble with modern rationalist understandings of "the natural cycle of life and death." In short, while we may now want to characterize Taoist yearnings for physical continuation after death as "unrealistic," there was nothing unnatural about their science, given the prevalent conceptions of what was natural.

Then, too, we might remark with Strickmann that our picture of Taoist notions of death is too often drawn from the metaphorical

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[1] This paper is adapted from my "Medieval Taoist Mortuary Practice," which will appear in Malay in Studies in Chinese Religion, Cheu, Hock-Tong, ed., (University of Malaysia). I would like to thank the Committee for Scholarly Communication with the Peoples' Republic of China and the Institute of Religious Studies of Sichuan University for supporting the field research that made this study possible.

[2] A. C. Graham, Chuang-tzu: The Inner Chapters, (London, 1986), p. 176. It is not difficult to collect a whole range of similar comments which reflect unfavourably on the Taoist religion, deploring its supposed debasement of "higher," philosophical predecessors. My purpose here is not to single out Graham for criticism, and certainly not to belabor his understanding of the Chuang-tzu, but to combat certain widespread and unexamined prejudices regarding the Taoist religion.

descriptions of hagiography, accounts which suggest that death was bypassed completely.[3] Such cryptic phrases as "liberation from the corpse," "the transformation of the cicada," and "feathered transformation" cloak religious mysteries. They are not meant as literal descriptions and yield little information when taken as such.[4]

Taoist scripture itself, as Strickmann shows definitively in the case of the Shang-ch'ing texts, often provides a somewhat clearer and less poetic account of the process by which death might be not avoided, but transcended. The stairway to the stars, we find, often leads through the valley of the shadow.

The present essay is not intended to demonstrate the applicability of these observations to the Taoist religion as a whole, but merely to add another bit of evidence on the Taoist confrontation with death. We will concern ourselves with the ascent to transcendence outlined in the early fifth-century Ling-pao ["Numinous Gem"] scriptures. I have elsewhere discussed the way in which these texts adapted Buddhist ideologies to traditional Chinese concerns.[5]

Here, too, it is important to pay attention to Buddhist thought, for the fourth and fifth centuries saw a profound change in Chinese ideas of death and the afterlife, a change originating in Buddhism, yet not in itself Buddhist. This is because Indian Buddhism distinguished itself from other schools of thought through its central notion of the "non-

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[3] Michel Strickmann, "On the Alchemy of T'ao Hung-ching," Facets of Taoism: Essays in Chinese Religion, Holmes Welch and Anna Seidel, eds. (New Haven, Yale University Press:1979), p.130.

[4] Among recent studies which elucidate the practices and beliefs underlying such terminology, the following should be consulted: Joseph Needham, Science and Civilization in China, (Cambridge, 1972) V. II, pp. 301-304; Isabelle Robinet, "Metamorphosis and Deliverance from the Corpse in Taoism," History of Religions 19.1(1979, pp. 57-70; and Anna Seidel, "Post-Mortem Immortality, or: The Taoist Resurrection of the Body," GILGUL: Essays on Transformation, Revolution and Permanence in the History of Religions (Leiden, 1987), pp. 223-237.

[5] See Stephen R. Bokenkamp, "Sources of the Ling-pao Scriptures," Tantric and Taoist Studies in Honour of R. A. Stein, Michel Strickmann, Ed., (Brussels: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1983), pp. 434-485 and "Stages of Transcendence: The Bhumi Concept in Taoist Scripture," Buddhist Apocrypha in East Asia and Tibet, Robert E. Buswell, Jr. ed., (forthcoming).

existence of a permanent ego (anâtmya)."[6] What transmigrated at death was not the individual soul, but what has been described as a "karma-clot," a wave of unrealized causes and conditions which will bear fruit in future existences. This was not fully understood by Chinese Buddhists until the 5th century C. E. and never fully replaced the Chinese version of this concept, that it was the individual "soul" which was reborn.[7]

Our present inquiry into Taoist views of death, then, takes into account texts written in a period when common Chinese notions concerning the fate of the dead were undergoing a profound revolution. The doctrine of rebirth of the personal soul was beginning not to replace, but to merge with older Chinese notions of the afterlife.

– Rebirth in pre-Ling-pao Texts –

It is not yet clear when Taoism began to include ideas of rebirth among its doctrines. The Hsiang-erh Commentary to the Tao-te ching, the earliest religious commentary to that text, dating perhaps to the third century C. E., contains two passages which might be references to reincarnation, but seem more likely to refer to a sort of "rebirth" in the unseen worlds. These will be discussed more fully below.

The first unambiguous Taoist account of reincarnation, so far as I have been able to discover, occurs in the Shang-ch'ing ["Upper Clarity"] scriptures of Yang Hsi (330-ca. 386). Now the Upper Clarity scriptures are devoted primarily to alchemical, dietary and meditative regimens by which the adept might hope to enter into the realms of the Perfected. At the same time, however, the scriptures provide an account of how one might advance in spiritual rank either in the cavern-heavens found

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[6] E. Zürcher, The Buddhist Conquest of China, (Leiden, 1959), V.I, pp. 11-12.

[7] For a translation and discussion of texts bearing on this question, see Walter Liebenthal, "The Immortality of the Soul in Chinese Thought," Monumenta Nipponica, VIII.1/2(1952), pp. 327-397.

under the holy mountains of China, or in the six heavens of Feng-tu.[8]

Those who continue their studies in this manner are called "underworld agents" [ti-hsia chu] and they are divided into three classes:[9] The first class consists of those dispersed in the minor waystations and hostelries along the subterranean passages which link the great cavern heavens. In accord with the statutes, the first grade of underworld agent is allowed to advance in rank once every one hundred and forty years. Only after the first promotion will he or she even be listed in the rankings of Transcendents.

The second class advances once every forty years and is already a quasi-Transcendent ranking, comparable to the Irregular Functionaries employed by the officials of district offices in the human world. The third class of underworld agent has gained the privilege of entering the halls of the Transcendents and will be found in residence at either the Palace of Change and Transference or the Palace of Youthful Incipience, where the Azure Lad annually checks the records of their advancement.[10] They will be allowed to venture forth to the Palace of Eastern Florescence , the domain of the Azure Lad to study the arts for "transforming their shapes and bathing their phosphors."[11] Yang Hsi's

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[8] T'ao Hung-ching (456-536), the compiler-annotator of Yang's visionary transcripts, calculates that Feng-tu is located "north of Liao-tung, in the midst of the north sea." See his Chen-kao, HY 1010, 15:1a.1-2. [Scriptures in the Taoist canon are cited here by their number in the Combined Indices to the Authors and Titles of Books in Two Collections of Taoist Literature, Weng Tu-chien, ed. (Peking: Harvard-Yenching Institute Sinological Series, No. 25; 1925). This number will be preceded by the initials "HY."]

[9] This name for the functionaries of the netherworld figures already in the Han religion studied so brilliantly by Anna Seidel. See Seidel, op. cit. and "Traces of Han Religion in Funeral Texts Found in Tombs," Dokyo to shukyo bunka (Volume in honour of Professor AKITSUKI Kan'ei), (Tokyo, 1986). For more on the Underworld Agents and their place in the Shang-ch'ing revelations as a whole, see Isabelle Robinet, La révélation du Shangqing dans l'histoire du taoïsme, (Paris: Publications de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, #137, 1984), Volume I.

[10] On the Azure Lad, an Upper Clarity avatar of the ancient Director of Destinies, see Paul W. Kroll, "In the Halls of the Azure Lad," Journal of the American Oriental Society, 105.1 (1985), pp. 75-94.

[11] The 'phosphors' mentioned here are the internal spirits of the adept. See Max Kaltenmark, "Ching yü pa-ching," Fukui hakase shoju kinen toyo bunka ronshu, (Tokyo, 1969), pp. 1147-1154 and Isabelle Robinet, Méditation taoïste, (Paris, Dervy-livres: 1979), pp. 217-219.

celestial informants were quite specific about their rate of advance:

> In twelve years their breaths will control their [internal] spirits and cloud-souls. In fifteen their [internal] spirits will be bound and their white-souls stored. In thirty years their bones will return from their coffins to be fitted with spirit and breath. In forty years they will be whole again as are the living and may return to roam in the human world. In fifty years their rank will reach that of a Transcendent officer...In one hundred years they may enter the K'un-ying Palace. This, then, is the highest stage of the underworld agent and [the beginning of] the carefree roaming of a Transcendent being.[12]

It is not entirely clear from this passage if the "return" after forty years is meant to be a sort of reincarnation, but T'ao Hung-ching understood it so, adding "receiving the bones from the coffin to be reborn in the world is something that often happens. This transformation and hidden movement [however] is hard to imagine. Presumably, we have entered here into an incomprehensible realm."[13]

That T'ao's characterization of this as a form of rebirth is not mistaken is clear from a further account of those who fill the ranks of the underworld agents. This description was drawn from the powerful Sword Scripture, an Upper Clarity text which unfortunately no longer survives as an independent work.[14] Here six different categories of underworld functionaries are distinguished. Their powers and rates of advance in the netherworld differ, depending on the moral virtues possessed by each. The six categories discussed are:

1) The loyal and filial.
2) Those of sagely virtue.
3) Those of great promise who do not seek after glory and fame

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[12] Chen-kao, 13:2a.6-10.

[13] Chen-kao, 13:2b.2-3.

[14] On this text, see Michel Strickmann, "On the Alchemy of T'ao Hung-ching," Facets of Taoism: Essays in Chinese Religion, Holmes Welch and Anna Seidel, eds. (New Haven, Yale University Press:1979), p.132. The passage in question here appears at Chen-kao, 16:10a-11b; Yün-chi ch'i-chien, HY 1026, 86:9b-11a; and Tao-tien lun, HY 1122, 2:11a-12b.

but retire from the world.

4) The chaste and incorruptible.
5) Those who in former lives had merit with the Three Officers.
6) Rulers who brought peace to the world of men.

It is the fifth category with its description of rebirth that interests us here. The explanation reads as follows:

> Of those who have merit with the Three Officers which flowed down to them as descendants of those in previous generations, some decide to shift generations through [corporal] refinement and transformation, changing their clans to be reborn. This action is intimately related to the hidden virtue of the seven generations. When they die, they must leave a foot bone with the Three Officers. The rest of their bones go with the body. Males leave a bone of the left foot and females, a bone of the right. They receive documentation as underworld agents who in 280 years will advance to the stage of earthbound Transcendents. [Then they are reborn and] when they are about to die, their bodies still have the aspect of the living. At death, their corpses are not rigid, their feet do not turn blue, and their extremities do not become wrinkled. Such are said to possess virtue and to have achieved a natural [ie. unaided by drugs] liberation from the corpse.[15]

Among traditional Chinese beliefs threatened by the doctrine of reincarnation, the most vital were those linking the individual to his clan. Filiality is only one aspect of this complex of beliefs. Succeeding generations were tied to their ancestors not only through reverence but also through "hidden [or dark] virtue" [yin-te], the good deeds of an ancestor which influenced the fortune of his descendants, particularly the descendant of the seventh generation. Misdeeds likewise affected the fates of the descendants. Now rebirth, as this passage indicates, involves leaving the clan and, in effect, joining another family. Such a postmortem procedure threatens to disrupt the assessment of "inherited

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15 Chen-kao, 16:12a.1-7.

burden" [ch'eng-fu], as the doctrine of merit and demerit transfer from one's ancestors came to be called. As a result, the Three Officers, the keepers of the registers of life, require a bone in surety that one's good deeds will remain in the family and that one is still causally connected to one's own seventh generation forbear. For example, Hsü Mi (303-373), Yang Hsi's patron, was informed by Yang's celestial visitants that his destiny was influenced not only by his Hsü clan forbears, but by the fact that he himself was the reincarnation of a man of the Chou dynasty who had requested rebirth into the Hsü family.[16]

Rebirth in the Shang-ch'ing scriptures, then, is not something for which everyone is destined. It is a procedure for which one must qualify through merit--only those who have already earned the postmortem rank of Underworld Agent may apply.

– The Ling-pao Transmutation of the Dead –

Rebirth in the Ling-pao scriptures is much closer to that described in Buddhist scripture. There are numerous references to the "five paths" of rebirth [Sanskrit: gati]; that is, into the earth-prisons, as a hungry ghost, as an animal, as a man, and as a celestial being. All except rebirth as a hungry ghost are explained in some detail. Here, though, we will concentrate on the destiny which the Ling-pao scriptures held out for the adept, the Taoist path.

The adept at the first stage of this path, the Disciple of Unsullied Belief, was one who had managed to let arise in her heart "thoughts of the natural Tao." This initial impetus, analogous to the "awakening of faith" of Buddhism, was an act of conscious volition to be cemented by the taking of the Ten Precepts and Twelve Admonitions.[17] All of this accords closely with what we know of the stages of the Bodhisattva path in Buddhism. Unlike the Buddhist disciple, however, the Disciple of Unsullied Belief is promised a mieh-tu at the conclusion of this very lifetime, something the Buddhist disciple might look forward to, if at all,

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[16] Strickmann, op. cit., p. 188.

[17] These are translated in the appendix following this paper.

only after the completion of all of the Boddhisattva vows. The reason for this rather surprising difference is that the Ling-pao understanding of the term differs radically from that of Buddhism.

The term mieh-tu, literally something like "destruction [of the cycle of rebirth] and crossing [the sea of suffering into non-existence]" was an early Chinese Buddhist translation term for Nirvana, for Buddhists the longed-for end of the samsaric cycle. The Ling-pao concept was somewhat different, based as it was on the earlier Chinese and Taoist notions we have been discussing. If the transmigration of karmic causes and conditions without the causal ego was difficult for Chinese thinkers to accept, the notion of non-existence as a spiritual goal was even more so. Consequently the term mieh-tu, which after all means only "to extinguish/destroy and cross over," was redefined in the Ling-pao scriptures. The author of the Ling-pao canon seems to have taken the term not as a compound verb, but as an adverb-verb construction--"oblivion-crossing" or "transit through extinction." The term retains its connection with samsâra, but the deliverance it suggests owes more to Taoist ideas of transcendence.

This use of the term mieh-tu occurs with particular clarity in the Ling-pao scripture entitled Transit through Extinction by the Refinement of the Five for the Revivification of the Corpse (hereafter: the Scripture for Revivification).[18] In the burial rite contained in this scripture, the priest is instructed to write a celestial text known as the Perfected Script in black on a green stone and to bury it while pronouncing its powerful words together with the following charge:

> The Eastern Blue Heaven of the Nine Pneumas, in accord with the talismanic orders of the [Heavenly Worthy] of Primal Origin, announces to the assembled numinous officers of the earth bureaus and sacred precincts found in the illimitable world systems of the East: At this time, the Most High Disciple of Unsullied Belief (insert name) is undergoing transfer through extinction. The Five Transcendents will entrust the corpse to the [Palace of] Supreme Darkness. At present this corpse resides in the antechamber of the palace of repose in the (insert name)

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[18] HY 369. A missing portion of this scripture may also be found in HY 1282.

realm, where we have hidden its bodily form with the Earth Guardian. In enlightened accord with the right law, you are to soothe and comfort it. The Blue Spirit will feed it with the purified rays of Nine Pneuma Dawn Flowers, augmenting and refining its form and frame, so that its bones are fragrant and its flesh perfumed, unperishing for 100 million kalpas. The Eastern Marchmount, Mount T'ai is to open its Bureau of the Nine Stygia of Enduring Night to release the cloud-soul[s] of (insert name), bathing, capping, and belting it [as an official] to transfer above to the Southern Palace where it will be provided with [suitable] raiment and nourishment to remain in [the realm of] brightness. Demons, do not dare to encroach upon this person! All spirits are to serve, guard, and secure this person in all respects in accord with the old canons of the Luminous Perfected of the Primal Worthy, the documents of Nü-ch'ing.[19]

The first thing we notice about this document is that it is organized according to the doctine of the Five Phases. The text we have here is specifically meant for the funeral of an adherent whose date of destiny associates him or her with the East, Mount T'ai, the number nine, the colour blue, and all the other elements along this chain of correspondences. The Scripture for Revivification also provides appropriate scripts for the other three directions and for the center. In these other cases, the document recited would be changed in certain details; the officials addressed would belong to the appropriate direction, the spirit ordered to "feed" the corpse would assume the appropriate color, the divine sustenance itself would be different, etc.

This document is, then, a charge emanating from the High Thearch, known by the awesome title Heavenly Worthy of Prime Origin [yüan-shih t'ien-tsun] in our scriptures, through the eastern celestial powers and directed to the underworld officers within their jurisdiction. The purpose of the charge is very much the same as that of the Han period sepulchral documents studied by Seidel, to arrange bureaucratic procedures on behalf of the dead.[20] The underworld officials are informed of the location of the body

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[19] HY 369, 7b-8a.

[20] See note eight above.

in the tomb--the antechamber of the Palace of Repose.[21] This characterization recalls at once the fact that, down through the ages, Chinese tombs were indeed constructed on the model of palace residences. Further notification is given that the Five Transcendents, lords at once of the five naked eye planets and of the five viscera, will descend to take charge of the cadaver, bearing it to the Palace of Supreme Darkness [t'ai-yin kung] where the Blue Spirit will rejuvenate it, refining its flesh and bones in alchemical fashion and preparing it for eternal life.

Meanwhile, we are given to understand that one of the more spiritual dimensions of the body, the cloud-soul, is now under the jurisdiction of the appropriate one of the Five Marchmounts, Mount T'ai.[22] Our document commands the officials of this realm to open their earth-prison (the Bureau of the Nine Stygia of Eternal Night) to release the believer's cloud-soul. This soul will ascend to the Southern Palace where it will also be nourished and garbed in such a fashion as to prepare it for eternal existence.

So much the document tells us. It appears at this point as if

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[21] This term for the tomb is highly signifigant, reflecting as it does the ancient Chinese practice of fitting out the tomb exactly as if it were to be a residence for the living. Chang Kwang-chih has noted elements of this practice as early as the fifth century B.C., when the walls of shaft tombs were sometimes decorated with the patterns of curtains. [see Kwang-chih Chang, The Archaeology of Ancient China, (New Haven, Yale University Press:1977), p. 357]. The practice seems to have intensified during the former Han and continued right up to modern times. Contemplation of this particular nomenclature might well resolve a question that has puzzled me for some time, that is the persistence of the practice of "summoning the soul" and its subsequent enshrinement in Confucian ritual texts when it must have invariably failed to bring the corpse back to life. The belief of modern scholars that this was somehow a ritual to revivify the dead finds its source in Wang Yi's (fl. A.D. 115) preface to the Chao-hun which claims that it was written by Sung Yu to summon back the soul of Ch'u Yuan. Hawkes has decisively demonstrated the error of this attribution and has persuasively argued that both it and the similar Ta-chao were written for kings of Ch'u (David Hawkes, tr., The Songs of the South, (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books: 1985), pp. 219-223). A close examination of both soul-summoning texts reveals that the errant cloud-souls are being summoned to return to a palace that, while filled with all the pleasures enjoyed in life, are invariably described as "tranquil" and "peaceful," not once, but throughout the poem. Could it not be, then, that the soul is being summoned to rejoin the body not in life but for a continued existence in the grave? There seems no way to prove this decisively, for the shaman-poets, as one would expect given the outfitting of royal tombs in the manner of the occupant's earthly palace, including even in this period the ritual sacrifice of favoured retainers and palace women, describe the pleasures of this Palace of Repose in every respect as they would describe his former abode.

[22] For an account of the constituents of the body, including the yang "cloud-soul" and the yin "white soul," as well as traditional ideas concerning the several destinations of these parts at death, see Joseph Needham, op. cit. V. II, pp. 85-93.

the common understanding that separate destinies await the cloud-soul and the body at death holds true here. The Palace of Supreme Darkness is known from Taoist texts predating this one to be the palace in the north where the bodies of the righteous dead were refashioned, preparing them for rebirth. Nonbelievers and the unrighteous who upon death proceeded to the far north were believed to fall under the judgement of the dread Three Officers, who might visit upon them any number of penalties. The cloud-soul, on the other hand, was refined in a similar fashion in the Southern Palace. The separation could be no more complete.

But the matter does not end there. Along with this imperial command, the Taoist presiding over this burial is instructed to pronounce words of incantation which, while they largely reiterate the directives of the command, further specify that the cloud-soul is to be reunited with the body for rebirth after a certain number of years. Other scriptures of the Ling-pao corpus confirm this and further lay out a system of advancement in merit by which a Disciple of Unsullied Belief such as the one in our sepulchral text might expect an improvement both in spiritual status and in worldly status as a result of this rebirth. Through unstinting practice of the Way of Ling-pao, he or she can expect nine further "refinements" of body and soul, analogous to the Nine-times recycled elixir of the alchemists, until becoming a "Disciple of Ten Cycles" [shih-chuan ti-tzu] fit, both physically and spiritually, to ascend to heaven for the final time to dwell forever among officials of the stellar bureaucracy.[23]

The modality of this and subsequent "transfers through extinction" [mieh-tu] is the Perfected Script which has been incised on stone and buried with the corpse. In other scriptures of the Ling-pao canon we learn more of its potencies. The Perfect Script, unrecognizable to human eyes, but strangely resembling ancient forms of Chinese script, is nothing less than the motive force of the Tao made manifest. Each of the sixty-four graphs of the

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[23] See Stephen R. Bokenkamp, "Stages of Transcendence: The Bhūmi Concept in Taoist Scripture," Robert E. Buswell, Jr. ed., Buddhist Apocrypha in East Asia and Tibet, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, forthcoming).

Perfected Script of the Eastern Heavens, for example, is to be found inscribed on the palaces and gates of the eastern heavens. Through knowledge of this celestial language, then, the adept might expect to have a sort of road map to the celestial realms. Further, the graphs represent the spirits and demons controlled by the Tao in these heavens, ensuring the bearer that the motive force which brings the earth through cycles of destruction and regeneration will do the same for her.[24] In other words, these are the archetypal wen, the graphic patternings observable in all things which, in traditional Chinese thought, might be read by the sage to guide him in his actions.[25]

The inspiration for such graphs lies not only in traditional Chinese notions of wen, however, for the idea of a "heavenly script" which must be translated into the human language was mightily reinforced by the introduction of Buddhism. In the strange foreign texts of Buddhism, the Chinese saw powerful scriptures, emanating from a veritable paradise of parks and gardens, if the prefaces of these scriptures might be believed, known as "Celestial Chu," [=India]. That the attractiveness of these settings had a marked impact on the author of the Ling-pao scriptures is evident from the fact that he has likewise set the revelations of his texts in similarly celestial gardens, bearing pseudo-Sanskrit names. The Perfected Script, then is also known as "the hidden language of the Great Brahman [ta-fan yin-yü]," and, when translated into mortal script, is written with standard Buddhist transcription characters.[26]

All of this is explicated in great detail in one of the sciptures of the Ling-pao canon, the Inner Sounds and Self-

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[24] This information is detailed in HY 97 and discussed in Bokenkamp, "Sources," pp. 461-465.

[25] See, for instance, HY 1, 1:1a-5b.

[26] By "Brahman" [fan], the author of the Ling-pao texts meant not the creator deity Brahma, but the demiurge responsible for the transformations which brought about the heavens and the earth. This demiurge he imagines as a breath or pneuma, perhaps to be identified with the "primal breath" [yüan-ch'i] which swirled in undifferentiation before the emergence of yin, yang, and the myriad things in more traditional Chinese accounts of the world's becoming.

generating Jade Graphs of the Various Heavens.[27] This scripture not only provides the celestial locations of each of the graphs, but also indicates, through providing a mundane character for each one, how it is to be pronounced. Each of the eight lines of our Perfected Script of the Eastern Heavens, to return to our example, represents one of the eight heavens of the east. Each graph, when translated into mortal script and pronounced in the true tones of the Central Kingdom, is shown to generate one line of an eight-line poem; one poem for each heaven. Both the poem and the eight graphs which feature in it are then glossed in the manner of more mundane exegesis.

This process is highly reminiscent of another Chinese text which purports to reveal the inner workings of the cosmos, the I-ching. Like the I-ching, the Perfected Script contains 64 protolanguage symbols, but the Perfected Script has further organized the sixty-four so that there is one set for each of the cardinal directions. Like the I-ching too is the fact that these symbols form the basis of verse which reveals their inner meaning and applicability to certain human situations. Both the Perfected Script and the I-ching are concerned with change and means of foretelling and controlling the possible outcomes of that change. Both draw from the patternings (wen) of creation holy information concerning the ultimate patternings of the Tao.

In transforming the I-ching in this way, the author of the Ling-pao scriptures is following such Han scholiasts as Chiao Yen-shou and Yang Hsiung.[28] Chiao Yen-shou's I-lin is an attempt to delve even deeper into the eternal patternings of the hexagrams so that they generate a greater number of prognostic verses, while Yang Hsiung's T'ai hsüan ching seeks out a different patterning

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[27] HY 97.

[28] For information on Ko Ch'ao-fu, grand-nephew of Ko Hung and author of the Ling-pao scriptures, see Stephen R. Bokenkamp, "Ko Hung," and "Ko Ch'ao-fu," in The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature, William H. Nienhauser, Jr., ed., (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 479-482. On Yang Hsiung's T'ai hsüan ching, see David Knechtges, The Han Rhapsody: a Study of the fu of Yang Hsiung (53 B. C. - A. D. 18), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 32-37.

based not on trigrams, but on tetragrams. The Ling-pao scriptures move one step beyond these earlier efforts in that he departs from the traditional patterns of broken and unbroken lines to consider the nature of the graph itself as central. While it is clear that this was done to counter the perceived exoticism of Buddhism, an attempt which must be judged only partially successful, it does succeed in touching a chord which resonates deeply in the Chinese psyche--that of the creative power of the written word.

Taoist strategy in confronting the Buddhist notion of reincarnation is similarly founded on traditional Chinese ideas of death and the afterlife. As Zürcher has so ably noted, foreign ideas tend to gain a foothold only in those "soft areas" where Chinese religion had no firm answer.[29] But even in such a case, we find that successful foreign ideas were remoulded and shaped so as to serve traditional notions. This process is one that bears close observation, for it was one that was to reshape Buddhism itself in ways that we are only beginning to understand.

In the document we examined above, we saw that the body of the deceased was to be alchemically refined in the Palace of Supreme Darkness. We find several references to this already in the early Hsiang-erh commentary to the Tao-te ching which is associated with the Way of the Celestial Masters and dates perhaps to the third century A.D. One of them reads as follows:

> "Supreme Darkness" is the palace where the Tao is gathered and [bodily] forms are smelted. When the world has no place for them to reside, the sagely ones depart, feigning death to pass into Supreme Darkness, so that their image is again born on the other side and they 'perish without destruction.' The vulgar cannot garner good deeds, so their death is a real death and they are taken off by the Earth Officials, to whom they belong.[30]

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[29] see Erik Zürcher, "Buddhist Influence on Taoist Scripture," T'oung-pao, LXVI, 1-3(1980), pp. 84-147.

[30] See Jao Tsung-i, Lao-tzu hsiang-erh chu chiao-chien, (Hong Kong: Tong Nam, 1956), p. 22 and p. 76 for Jao's commentary. See also p. 46, where the process is similarly described: "When a Taoist's actions [in this world] are complete, the spirits of the Tao call him [or her] to return. He

Here the alchemical remoulding which takes place in the Palace of Supreme Darkness seems to lead not to rebirth, but to a continued physical existence beyond the grave. The adept's image or "simulacrum", a perfected form of the earthly body, lives again on the other side. In the Ling-pao texts, this same process has been taken as the Taoist's answer to reincarnation. Rather than reincarnation or transmigration, we might style this process in true alchemical fashion "the transmutation of the dead."

As pervasive as was the idea of the Palace of Supreme Darkness in Taoism, it did not provide the whole answer to Buddhist reincarnation. Most likely it was felt that this scheme was not specific enough regarding the fate of both sorts of soul, one yin and one yang. It will be remembered that our text provided for a two-part transmutation, one involving the yin components of the person--the body and the white-soul--and the other the yang component, the cloud-soul. The cloud soul was to be refashioned by fire in the Southern Palace. The Southern Palace is not unique to Ling-pao Taoism; it appears as well in earlier Taoist scripture. In the Shang-ch'ing scriptures of Yang Hsi, it is known variously as the Palace of Vermilion Luminescence, the Palace of Cinnabar Shadows or simply the Southern Palace. [31]

The idea of the southern palace for remoulding the bodies of the dead seems to have entered Taoism through the southern alchemical traditions which informed the Shang-ch'ing scriptures, but it is a very old one indeed. The earliest reference I have found is in the Ch'u-tz'u song entitled "Far-off Journey," where it is referred to as Nan-ch'ao.[32] It is to this spot that the poet, after discovering that once his "spirit darted forth and did not return, [his] body, left tenantless, withered and grew lifeless," repaired to consult with the Transcendent Wang Tzu-

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flees the world and entrusts himself to death, passing through the Palace of Supreme Darkness. From there he is reborn and does not perish...The profane have no merit and, when they die, belong to the Officials of the Earth. This is to perish." This passage is discussed by Seidel, "Post-Mortem," p. 230.

[31] See Isabelle Robinet, La révélation, Vol. 1, pp. 209ff.

[32] For a full translation of this poem, see David Hawkes, The Songs of the South, (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books:1985), pp. 191-202.

ch'iao. Here a marvellous and clearly post-mortem alchemical transmutation takes place:

> In the morning I washed my hair in the Hot Springs of Sunrise,
> In the evening I dried myself where the ten suns perch.
> I sipped the subtle potion of the Flying Springs,
> And held in my bosom the radiant metallous jade.
> My pallid countenance flushed with brilliant colour,
> Purified, my vital essence began to grow stronger;
> My corporeal parts dissolved to a soft suppleness,
> And my spirit grew lissome and eager for movement.[33]

Following this, he embarks on the celestial journey for which the poem is named.

The images here are, as Needham has noted, undoubtedly alchemical, but the remoulding described, whether effected by chemical substances or through the agency of other Taoist practices such as the absorption of vital breaths, is precisely the same as that of our Ling-pao grave text.

In joining these two avenues of physical continuity, through the yin-natured Palace of Supreme Darkness in the north and the yang-natured Southern palace, the Ling-pao scriptures provide for the departed an indisputably complete transmutation which, through the primal power of the Perfected Script, is made available to both the adept and to his ancestors. In such a synthesis, the Buddhist notion of reincarnation is fully sinicized, traditional Chinese concepts of the body are given precedence, and the necessity of the unity of both physical and material components of man for post-mortem existence is reasserted. As Needham has emphasized:

> In accord with the character of all Chinese thought, the human organism was an organism neither purely spiritual nor purely material. It was not a machina with a single deus in it, which could go off and survive

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[33] This translation is adapted from that of Joseph Needham, Science and Civilization, V:2, pp. 100-101. Needham remarks the alchemical imagery of this passage, but not its relation to the "transmutation of the bodily form" in the Southern Palace of later Taoism.

> somewhere else; and for any recognizable continuance of identity its parts were not separable. This is why Taoist immortality inescapably involved elements of materiality.[34]

The strength of this belief in the essential unity of the body with the self, however conceived, was something that Buddhism never did fully overcome, in large part due to such startling and longevous syntheses as that of the Ling-pao scriptures.

The information we have gathered above reveals as well that Taoist practices for post-mortem physical survival do not controvert the "spontaneous course of biological process" as this was understood in the time they were written. The Ling-pao texts, in particular, take account of the popular scientific theories of the day--five-phase cosmology and the material and immaterial constituents of the human being. While we now may style these "protophysics" and "protobiology" because of their inadequate experimental bases, they were nonetheless the science of the times.

Finally, and most importantly, we have added one more piece to our knowledge of the Taoist view of death. Taoism was aptly styled "the Way of Immortality," but we need to understand that its systems contained room as well for the biological necessity of death and that the "immortality" offered was often to be secured by the adept only after passing through death. Information gathered on this subject is still sparse, but it is my belief that we will find Taoist views of death to be much more complex, and more valuable, than superficial characterizations of the religion may lead us to believe.

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[34] Needham, op. cit., V:2, p. 92.

APPENDIX

The Moral Basis of Transcendence: Precepts for the Disciple of Unsullied Belief

The Ten Precepts

1) Your heart should not harbour jealousy nor should it give birth to the dark thief.[35] Be reserved in speech and cautious of transgressions. Keep your thoughts on the dharma.

2) Maintain humaneness and do not kill. Have pity for and succor the myriad forms of life. Let your compassion, love, and [efforts toward] universal redemption reach to all.

3) Maintain purity and be withdrawing in your actions. Be neither dissolute nor thieving, but constantly harbour benevolent thoughts, taking from yourself to aid others.

4) Be not lewd and filled with desire. Let your heart be not licentious, but remain pure and behave prudently so that your actions be without blemish or stain.

5) Your mouth should utter no evil words, nor should your speech be flowery and ornate. Within and without you should be straightforward and commit no excesses of speech.

6) Avoid liquors and moderate your behaviour so as to regulate the breaths [which vivify your body] and your nature, so that your [internal] spirits are not diminished and you do not commit any of the myriad evils.

7) Be not jealous of other's victories, nor strive yourself for

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[35] The "dark thief" is that internal disposition which gives rise to evil thoughts and deeds.

achievement and fame. Be retiring in all things, [even to the extent of] hindering [your own spiritual advance] for the salvation of others.

8) You should not engage in debate concerning the scriptures and teachings, nor should you revile and slander the saintly texts. Remain contrite in heart, upholding the dharma ever as if you were face to face with the spirits.

9) You must not struggle or create disturbance through argument concerning monks, nuns, female and male laity, or heavenly beings, for censure and hate will diminish your [corporal] spirits and breaths.

10) All of your actions should proceed from equanimity and wholeheartedness, ensuring that exchanges between mankind and the spirits are ever respectful.

The Twelve Admonitions:

1) Observing how the Perfected Scriptures set forth the dharma for the liberation and salvation of all, I will let arise in my heart thoughts of the Way and vow to rise to the status of a great sage in the lives to come.

2) I will constantly practice compassion and vow that all will hear the dharma and that salvation will extend universally, without hindrance or distortion.

3) Delighting in the scriptures and teachings, I will study them widely to let my understanding deepen and to make my will firm and enlightened. I will liberate and transform the ignorant.

4) I will respectfully accept the training of my Master, allowing the transformative teachings to spread abroad so that all might, departing from the paths of blindness, enter the walls of the dharma [palace].

5) I will cause my faith to extend to the mysterious and the wondrous, respect the teachings and moral injunctions, and recite the scriptures morning and night without neglect.

6) I will not labor for glory and ornamentation to break the chain of vulgar causations. With steadfast heart and settled will, all I undertake will be in the dharma.

7) Diligently reciting the Grand Scriptures, I vow that all beings shall find the bridge of release so that all future life enjoys good karma.

8) I will ever maintain a benevolent heart, without perverseness or falsity, without envy or thoughts of injury, without evil or jealousy.

9) I vow that all things given life find themselves in a generation of sages, in a world in which the dharma teachings of the Numinous Treasure are passed on without lapse.

10) In pureness of body I will keep the precepts, practice the Purifications, establish merit, and thereby broadly save the myriad beings that all achieve salvation.

11) In my studies, I will read broadly and with insight in the caverns of the law to prepare the way for heavenly beings to save all.

12) Life after life I will seek an enlightened Master, receiving the teachings and spreading them for the salvation of humankind that all with a right heart might achieve the status of Perfection in the Tao.

Ways to the Way
A Review of Bibliographies on Taoism

"Bibliography of Taoist Studies." *By Donna Au and Charon Rowe* . In M. Saso and D. Chappell, editors. Buddhist and Taoist Studies I. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1977. pp. 123-148.

"Present-Day Taoist Studies." *By David C. Yu* . Religious Studies Review 3,4 (October 1977): 220-239.

"Selected Bibliography of Philosophical Taoism." *By Jae-ryong Shim* . Journal of Chinese Philosophy 7 (1980): 341-356.

Chinese Religion in Western Languages. A Comprehensive and Classified Bibliography of Publications in English, French and German through 1980. *Compiled by Laurence G. Thompson* . Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1985. Pp. 302. Author index.

Guide to Chinese Religion. *By David C. Yu* . Boston, Massachusetts: G.K. Hall & Co., 1985. Pp. 200. Author/Title index, Subject index.

Westliche Taoismus-Bibliographie (WTB) Western Bibliography of Taoism. *Compiled by Knut Walf* . Essen: Verlag Die Blaue Eule, 1986. Pp. 101.

A Select Bibliography on Taoism. *Compiled by Julian F. Pas* . Stony Brook, New York: The Institute for Advanced Studies of World Religions, 1988. Pp. 52. Author index.

As one of China's major religious and philosophical traditions, Taoism has a long history of scholarly inquiry. Christian missionaries were among the first and most active students of this esoteric religion. However, in the past three or four decades, a growing number of dedicated specialists have brought Taoist studies to the forefront of research on Chinese religion. With the increased interest in Taoism, more and more specialized bibliographies are being compiled. The oldest such bibliography is that of Désiré Jean Baptiste Marceron, who compiled the Bibliographie du Taoïsme in 1898.

Although a handful of bibliographies on Taoism were published in the first half of this century, the next

watershed work is another French bibliography with the same title as Marceron's. The more recent "Bibliographie du Taoïsme" was compiled by Michel Soymié and F. Litsch in two parts: "Part one deals primarily with philosophy and history, canon, and the immortals (Soymié and Litsch, 1968); part two deals with Chinese folk religion and alchemy (Soymié, 1971)." (Yu, 1977: 228) Published in the Franco-Japanese series Études taoïstes-Dôkyô Kenkyû, this particular bibliography of Western language sources on Taoism is not widely available. Therefore, the first readily available bibliographies are the "Bibliography of Taoist Studies" and "Present-day Taoist Studies," both published in 1977.

The "Bibliography of Taoist Studies" was compiled by Donna Au and Charon Rowe. It appears at the end of Buddhist and Taoist Studies I. Aside from eleven entries under Michael Saso, co-editor of the monograph, this bibliography contains very little material published after 1970. In a postscript, the compilers confide that this bibliography was based on Soymié and Litsch (1968/1971) with a few important changes. Firstly, the five hundred and forty entries are listed alphabetically by author rather than divided into subtopics. The question of classifying sources is an issue in all bibliographies examined here. The choice not to classify is a feasible one in cases such as this with a limited number of references. In fact, the compilers achieve a moderate degree of classification in the listing of all translations of primary sources (i.e. the Tao-te Ching (100), Chuang-tzu (22), and Lieh-tzu (4)) under the names of their traditionally ascribed authors. This is presumably a functional decision rather than a reflection of the historical integrity of these authors. Lao Tzu, Chuang-tzu, and Lieh-tzu are the three most famous ancient thinkers or "patriarchs" of Taoist thought. However, most scholars today question not only their authorship of the works that

bear their names but also, in the case of Lao Tzu, their historical identity.

The second important change that Au and Rowe introduce is the inclusion of East Asian language sources, specifically Chinese and Japanese. This marks a recognition of Asian scholarship in the field. Again, the postscript suggests that compilation was targeted at "major Japanese scholars" which explains why Japanese entries (21) far exceed Chinese secondary sources (5). Certainly some of the best known Japanese scholars of Taoist studies, Fukui Kôjun, Kubo Noritada, Ôbuchi Ninji, and Yoshioka Yoshîtoyo, are included. However, the compilers list Japanese entries which reflect more popular aspects of Chinese religion while overlooking other major Taoist specialists such as Sakai Tadao, Shimode Sekiyo, and Yoshioka Gihô. Nevertheless, the attempt to include East Asian language sources represents an innovative and important direction in bibliographic studies. A special note should be made of the interesting Russian language sources (i.e. Tolstoy) which usually get overlooked in Western-language compilations.

David Yu's "Present-Day Taoist Studies" appeared in October of 1977. This was more of a review article on the state of Taoist studies rather than a simple bibliography. In it, Yu provides an incisive summary of the different specialty areas in Taoist studies and the issues they face. One not only gets a sense of the history of Taoist studies but also of what types of research are being done in different parts of the world. Together, these aspects amount to what Yu calls a "global perspective." (p. 220) Yu's commentary is arranged under eight headings, with special recognition given to scholarship in the People's Republic of China (i.e. the archaeological discoveries at Ma Wang Tui). Of the 94 sources listed alphabetically at the end of his text, Yu includes numerous Japanese (9) and

Chinese (22) references. Many of the Chinese references deal with the Ma Wang Tui manuscripts, but such important scholars as Ch'en Kuo-fu, Feng Yu-lan, and Sun K'e-k'uan are featured. What gives Yu's bibliography an enduring relevence is his up-to-date presentation of work in press and work in progress.

The year 1977 marked a significant shift in Western bibliographies on Taoism. This was the introduction of Oriental language sources. The Dôkyô kenkyû bunken mokuroku-Nippon, a 94-page bibliography devoted to Taoist studies in Japan, appeared in 1972 but there is some question as to its compiler. Au and Rowe assert that William Doub had compiled the bibliography whereas Yu attributes the work to Sakai Tadao. The real mystery is why Western bibliographers after 1977 did not continue and expand upon the precedent set by Au, Rowe, and Yu.

Jae-ryong Shim's "Selected Bibliography of Philosophical Taoism" specifically caters to research on Taoist philosophy. It further limits its selection to "European language" sources from the 25-year period, 1940-1975. In doing so, Shim excludes work done by Western scholars on the Ma Wang Tui texts. These studies did not emerge until the late '70s and '80s and interest has been devoted to their historical and philological value. The bibliography's 352 entries are unclassified. A majority deal with the Tao Te Ching and the Chuang-tzu, the textual representatives of Lao-Chuang thought. Shim's contribution to completing the picture of Taoist studies in the West includes compiling sources from a rich and wide variety of languages.

One of the better known bibliographies is Lawrence G. Thompson's Chinese Religion in Western Languages. The first edition was published in 1975 and was inclusive of all English, French, and German sources to the year 1970. Both Au/Rowe (1977: 148) and Yu (1977: 220) make special

reference to this bibliography as a supplement to their own. However, this review will focus on the updated edition published in 1985 which covers sources through 1980. Aside from the unorthodox practice which alters the titles' original capitalization, this is a very useful reference work. Although he does not provide annotations throughout, Thompson includes brief statements concerning content when a specific title is ambiguous. Thompson's is a comprehensive listing of not only Taoist religion but also the many other manifestations of Chinese religion. The bibliography is divided into three parts: I) Bibliography and General Studies; II) Chinese Religion Exclusive of Buddhism; and III) Chinese Buddhism. References on Taoism are concentrated under ten headings in Part Two. Aside from general studies, the headings include Taoist texts, theory, history, cults, sects, and alchemy. To his credit, Thompson lists some 931 references making his the most extensive Western-language bibliography on Taoist studies. Thompson emphasizes the aim to distinguish religion from philosophy, which he feels have been confused in treatments of Lao Tzu and Taoism. (p. ix) David Yu (1977: 220-221), on the other hand, presented the view that most scholars today view Taoist philosophy and Taoist religion as two inseparable subtraditions. This is an important issue from the viewpoint of the historical development of Taoism, however, Thompson is justified in his efforts to focus on the religious subtradition. Thus for more general studies of Taoism, this bibliography would best be consulted in conjunction with those dealing more specifically with philosophical themes in Taoism.

David Yu's most recent bibliographical contribution is the Guide to Chinese Religion. Like Thompson's Chinese Religion in Western Languages, the Guide to Chinese Religion does not deal exclusively with Taoism and focuses on the religious dimension. Thompson's collaboration in the

preparation of this guide is not surprising. The Guide to Chinese Religion is one of a series of classified and annotated bibliographies on Asian religions and philosophies. For references on philosophical Taoism, one will eventually be able to consult the companion source, Guide to Chinese Philosophy. The references are organized under eleven general headings which refer to key features of religious traditions. In order to find material specifically on Taoism, one need only look for related subheadings. Yu's subheadings are frequently elaborate and detailed. In the section on historical development, the subheadings are arranged in chronological order and form a concise summary of the history of Taoism. What makes Yu's Guide to Chinese Religion particularly useful are the annotations which summarize the content of each reference. In a recent review, Michael Saso (PEW 37 (1987): 333-334) points out a few subjective errors but Yu's comments remain an invaluable and innovative asset. There is a total of approximately one thousand annotated references. Certain sourcebooks (i.e. Wing-tsit Chan, 1963 & 1969) are dissected to reveal their specific contents and the amount of cross-listing makes it difficult to determine the total number of sources on Taoism. The books and articles included in this guide were published before 1977 and thus much of the recent scholarship on Taoism is not represented.

Helping to fill the gap of bibliographic references on Taoist studies in the 1980s are two recent bibliographies. These are Knut Walf's Westliche Taoismus-Bibliographie (WTB) Western Bibliography of Taoism and Julian Pas' A Select Bibliography on Taoism. The former is a European bibliography which includes a balanced number of publications in other European languages and different translations of standard works. Walf's references are right up-to-date to the time of publication (1986), however, he

consciously excludes all articles which form a significant portion of current research. Pas' bibliography does include some recent scholarship published in journals, however, it is far from representative of the last eight years. The next comprehensive bibliography of Taoist studies in the 1980s may not be published until 1995, presumably the next edition of Thompson's Chinese Religion in Western Languages.

This survey of bibliographies on Taoism reveals three issues which will guide all future bibliographies: i) classification, ii) annotations, and iii) the inclusion of all Western and Eastern language sources. As the number of references on Taoism grows, the need for classification increases. The works reviewed here represent a range of degrees of classification adopted by compilers. In order from low to high degree, Walf, Thompson, Yu (1977), Pas, and Yu (1985) all recognize the need for classification. Annotations are an innovative feature of bibliographies. We have seen how effective they can be with David Yu's most recent Guide to Chinese Religion and Julian Pas envisions a similar enhancement of his A Select Bibliography on Taoism. As for the inclusion of East Asian language sources, it is high time that modern scholarship in China and Japan be recognized alongside that in the West. In 1977, Au, Rowe, and Yu set the precedent towards a more linguistically complete compilation of Taoist references. Ideally all three issues can be incorporated in producing a comprehensive bibliography on Taoism.

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ICONS AND ICONOCLASM

THE EARTH DIVER HSI IN TAOISTIC RECALL

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The story of the Sage-king Yu is well known to any student of China. Yu is the Chinese Noah. He is the hero of the Flood, the man who stemmed the waters and saved China, for which he was rewarded with the throne, by the then reigning Sage-king Shun.

But this hero, Yu, is known to be the son of Hsi, the water engineer whom Shun first asked for help to stop the flooding. Unfortunately, Hsi was a stubborn man, who would not heed the advice of others. So, unwisely failing to dig the water bed deeply, as Yu would later do, Hsi's stopgap measure was simply to build up the dikes. The levee broke in time, and the flooding was worse than before. For his failure, Hsi was punished. He is supposed to have been executed at Feather Mountain. So we are told by the Confucian record, the Book of History.

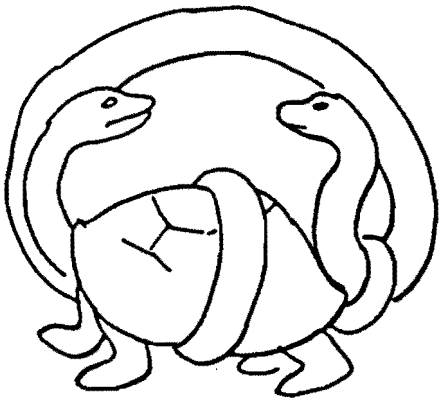
The story, up to this point, sounds human and, although somewhat dramatic, reasonable enough. However, in the Shan-hai-ching (Classic of Mountains and Waters), we are told something else about the ending, which reminds us that, after all, we might be dealing with more than a Confucian moral drama of a Wise Yu and a foolish Hsi. We read of some strange happenings at Feather Mountain. Hsi, who was about to be killed (or as he was being killed), somehow changed himself into a yellow bear (huang hung), and jumped into the Feather River, next to the mountain.

It took some diligent detective work, especially by Japanese scholar Mori Yasutaro, to uncover the story behind the story. (1) Briefly, Feather Mountain is in the western suburb, and is supposed to be the site of the autumnal sacrifice. At that regular harvest festival in China, some animal was and is routinely sacrificed. Hsi was that sacrificial animal. But, as is often the case with seasonal festivals, that which dies with the autumn would come back to life with spring. By diving into the Feather River, Hsi was making his trip to the Kingdom of the Dead. The Feather River is

the Chinese Styx. The Feather River flowed north into the North Sea, the "land" of the dead. Hsi, whose body would not decompose for three years (read: three wintry months) would return in spring in the form of a dragon -- whom we know better as the Sage-king Yu (yu: fish).

In the modern rediscovery of this ancient myth, old distortions have been corrected. For example, it is now fairly certain that Hsi did not turn into a bear, or hung. He turned into a mythical three-legged tortoise called a neng. Hung and neng are identical in script except for a dot. But what is a three-legged tortoise? (2) In the process, we have discovered other things, this time about Yu. The human hero we take as Yu is now also known to be, somehow, a dragon, or more specifically, a small dragon, a serpent, or a fish that can dance on one leg. Yu is even said to have the nose of a tiger and the beak of a bird. (3) Some of these strange associations can be rationalized away, but it is not easy to convince the anthropocentric minds who cannot conceive of themselves as anything but man, "the measure of all things." None of these anomalies will bother those who have enough "animal sense" still to realize that we are never quite fully human. Whether we are man or animal may depend on which side of the bed we get out of this morning -- as Kafka reminded us to well, in a Taoist horror tale, "Metamorphosis."

What reason cannot explain, perhaps an icon can unlock:



The Black Warrior

The above is a picture of the Dark Warrior (drawn from a Northern Wei artifact in the Seattle Art Museum, shown in Anthony Christie's CHINESE MYTHOLOGY, pp. 82-83) an ancient Chinese icon that one sometimes still comes across, on an old shelf in some old medicine shop. This figure of a tortoise (alias Hsi) intertwined with a snake (alias Yu) represents the deathless, the im-

mortal, the all-healing, the natural cycle of the year. To the comparative mythologist, this is only another variant of "the snake biting its tail," the intertwined serpents of Hermes, and the caduceus of the American Medical Association. Tortoise and Snake are just death and life, fall and spring, Hsi and Yu, Yin and Yang, Tiger and Dragon, ad infinitum.

Before Hsi become the foolish father of the wise Yu, before he was accused of having failed at his task, he was remembered for a heroic career. He was the one who would have stopped the Flood, had not the Lord on High foiled his plan at the last minute. The poem called "Questions to Heaven," in the shamanic Songs of the South, wonders aloud what this strange pair of animals, the Tortoise and the Swallow (or Owl) were doing, the former "dragging its tail" behind it (presumably in the mud) after its winged companion, which goes in front. And what has the Tortoise done, asks the poem, to deserve the punishment it received? Why, above all, would Heaven so have foiled the near-success of Hsi, when his work was about to be completed -- when there was only "one last basket" to go?

The reference to the "last basket" is to the story of the alleged theft by the Tortoise and the Swallow, of a magical piece of earth from Heaven. The Tortoise and the Swallow made their way to Heaven, and the bird hid a tiny piece of that loot in its beak. That piece was all Hsi needed for stopping the waters, because it could magically expand and become the dry land of the continents. The Lord on High -- the god of Heaven -- discovered the theft and came after that piece of dirt, snatching it from Hsi at the last moment, the "last basket." The Flood reconquered the land. Hsi failed and was executed for his folly. It is a scenario that even we would "question Heaven" and ask, Why?

The answer is hidden in a widespread myth type, of a tiny bit of earth expanding to form dry land, and doing so against an enveloping body of water. That is a folklore type, a creation myth type (Motif A 812 of the international folklorist index) (4), the Exploits of the Earth Diver. It is found all over the world, with its root apparently in East Asian coastal areas, but spreading both West, into continental Eurasia, and East, across the Pacific, into early North America (but somehow skipping Alaska). Orientalists will recognize the Japanese version most easily, because it has been canonized in its ancient texts:

> *Izanagi and Izanami stood on the floating bridge of Heaven, and held counsel together, saying: "Is there*

> not a country beneath?" Thereupon they thrust the spear of Heaven, and groping about therewith, found the ocean. The brine that dripped from the point of the spear coagulated and became an island, which received the name Ono-goro-jima. (5)

The "divine islands," Japan, are supposedly born of this "diving" stick. The Chinese variant is less well received, because China is not an island culture. In the North American Indian version of the Earth Diver myth, the following is involved:

> The myth relates how a being dives to the bottom of the sole existing ocean, to get sand from which the earth will be created. The usual points are: the being (animal, god, or man) gets only an extremely small amount of sand or mud under its nail or claw; it is away for a long time; it is dead or half-dead when it reappears. From the small amount of sand the earth is created. . . . (6)

In that sense, Hsi is the Earth Diver of China. He was the animal, the man, the demigod, who salvaged a piece of dirt that also magically grew to reclaim dry land from the waters.

But there is a curious item in the Chinese version. It is not the involvement of the Swallow or the sacrifice of Hsi. We find birds in the North American tales as well; having two animals as Earth Divers is not unimaginable. Just like the beaver building its home by diving for mud, and dragging in branches with which it constructs its earthen dam (and Hsi the Tortoise could also have been a sui-liao, an otter), the bird is also known to build its nest with mud and twigs carried in its beak. The death of the hero -- the Tortoise, not the Bird -- is also a standard theme in many North American tales; some of them involve the punishment of the animal for misbehaving, such as the Raven which flapped its wings, creating mountains out of flat lands, against a divine interdict. The anomaly is not even that Hsi was no cosmogonic creator of land. That cosmogony goes better with Oceania than with continental China. The anomaly is that the Hsi story, as we have it now, is not a "Diver" myth is the strictest sense of the term. Instead of getting the dirt from the bottom of the ocean, the burglary is performed in Heaven above. This could explain why, instead of having the Tortoise diving for mud from the bottom of a pond, it is now necessary to involve the Swallow, an aerial bird, in that Heavenly theft.

To explain this anomaly, I think we have to introduce the thesis

of Marija Gimbutas. We have to appreciate zoomorphic deities (birds, snakes, etc.) in the "gathering and hunting" cultures of the Neolithic era, and then recall how these early gods would become subsumed under Mother Earth in the agrarian societies, and finally lose out the the Sky deities to come. Hsi figures here as the life-giving sacrifice, the water animal whose death is basic to the seasonal cycle of all life. This fits Gimbutas' image of the goddess (who can take either male or female form at this stage.)

> *Female snake, bird, egg and fish played parts in creation myths and the female goddess was the creative principle. The Snake Goddess and Bird Goddess create the world, charge it with energy, and nourish the earth and its creatures with the life-giving element conceived as water. The waters of heaven and earth are under her control. The Great Goddess emerges miraculously out of death, out of the sacrificial bull, and in her body the new life begins. (7)*

Hsi the Tortoise belongs to that early stratum of zoomorphic gods and goddesses which are, strictly speaking, pre-chthonic -- antecedent to a single Earth Mother. A characteristic of these deities is their extreme naturalism: these are the birds, beasts, fishes of the human environ, which which human beings could at one time identify. But with the rise of the sky gods, the naturalism disappeared, and the zoomorphic deities survived, instead, as chthonic monsters, as hybrid beings (half human, half beast), as composite beings ("tiger nostril, bird beak" and the like), with famous deformities (one-eyed, three-legged, etc.). (8)

It is probably in the rise of the cult of the Lord on High, and of Heaven, that Hsi became, instead of the hero who created the first land, the villain that stole a certain property (a power) which belonged to omnipotent Heaven alone. For that defiant crime, Hsi would be severely punished. The death of the hero, often a result of his labor, is now retold as his execution. His tie to the seasonal festivals -- death in fall, rebirth in spring -- is well-nigh forgotten. The Hsi-Yu cycle is broken into two stories: the foolish Hsi who was killed, and the sage Yu, who won the hearts and the minds of the people.

And what is the crime of Hsi? The same that Oedipus (the swollen-legged, the deformed) was cursed with: <u>hubris</u>. Pride.

He overstepped the bounds set for mortal man. This sin is also charged to Hsi, who was too proud to heed advice. In the Confucian context, pride consists in not listening to Confucian advisors. Hsi would not listen, while Sage-king Yao would. That aspect aside, Hsi also overstepped his bounds in the eyes of the new god, for the simple reason that he was the old god, the hero who lived and died and would be reborn. Such claim to immortality is not human. Heaven is not zoomorphic. By being anthropomorphic and eternal, it also reminds man that, as man, he is also mortal. (9)

As all these elements were in place even before "Taoism" appeared on the scene, what have they to do with Taoism?

We read the Chuang-tzu and we see its author as a philosopher. In confronting the text, we apply still more the modern principle of interpretation, and make him out to be virtually a contemporary thinker, even an existentialist mystic. In so doing, we carry him forward in time, with some violence. The Chuang-tzu contains as much pre-philosophical material, primitive lore that Chuang-tzu himself (or his school) never fully renounced, never fully demythologized; in fact, if anything, Chuang-tzu, known for his poetic style, only remythologized them anew. In reading the text of Chuang-tzu, we can no longer ignore these elements. Thus it is imperative that we return him backward to his time.

Here are some of the mythic motifs, mentioned in our analysis of Hsi, that reappeared, semi-transformed, in the Chuang-tzu:

In the very first chapter, "Free and Easy Wandering," we are told of the giant fish called K'un, in the North Sea, transforming itself into the giant bird called P'eng. (10) K'un is the fish called Hsi, by another name. When the Tortoise (or hsi fish) swam up the Feather River, he ended up in the North Sea. In spring, when Hsi is reborn as Yu, the moment is accompanied by the spring wind, which, in mythopoeic form, is the Phoenix, and here the giant roc called P'eng. In the chapter "Autumn Flood" (section 17), we see the giant Turtle of the Eastern Sea, and, pitted against it, the tiny frog of the well -- two ancient cousins of Immortality, now set against one another. (11) And when Chuang-tzu, in a legend, refused an invitation to office, saying that he would rather be like the turtle wallowing in the mud, that, too, is the immortal Hsi, dragging his tail behind him.

In the chapter on "The Sign of Virtue Complete" (section 5), all the heroes who could keep that innate te intact and bring it to

fruition are cripples and deformed men: Wang T'ai who had his foot cut off, Shen-t'u chia who has lost a leg, Shu-shan No-Toes, a monstrous-looking Ai T'ao-t'o, and a weird Mr. Lame-Hunchback-No Lips. (12). These are more than one man's poetic imagination. Like other cripples and madmen chosen by Chuang-tzu as his heroes, these are memories of bygone heroes and demigods who knew precisely how to live forever, but who, under the rise of the cult of Heaven and of Confucian humanism, had been written off as chthonic monsters. They are now resurrected by Chuang Tzu as embodiments of Taoist virtue. The various handicaps do not indicate incompleteness, but rather continuing completion, endless transformation.

Nor are the talking rivers and seas, personified tortoise, birds, cicadas, frogs and myriads of animals, even trees, an arbitrary literary device. They are recollections of a religion gone by. It is not unlike the use of the "animal male" and "animal female" in the Lao-tzu. Likewise, the reference to reality as The Great Clod, by Chuang-tzu, has to be a chthonic memory, just as the story of hun-tun is cosmogonic, and the characterization of nature as The Great Transformation is a celebration of the endless goddess in her many metamorphoses.

. . . (13) If Taoism regards primitivism to be the storehouse of wisdom, it is important that we rediscover those old icons which inform its new iconoclasm, icons that predated the rise of Heaven and of Confucius, icons that appear iconoclastized only if we accept as normative the systematic distortion of a pre-Chou worldview, a distortion that was initiated by that revolution which is the cult of Heaven, and that sustained that reformation that is Confucius. In moralizing religion, this Chou legacy also mortalizes "zoomorphic humanity", and alienates humanity from the world of nature. It is to repeal that alienation, that anthropocentrism, that Chuang-tzu would recall those old myths and revive those icons, for a new age.

NOTES

(1) The Mori Yasutao thesis has been introduced in my "Symbolism of Evil in China: The K'ung-chia Myth Analyzed." History of Religions, vol. 23,4 (1984), pp. 316-343.

(2) See Whalen Lai, "The One-Legged and the Three-Legged: A Chinese Answer to the Riddle of the Sphinx." Asian Cultural Studies, 15 (Tokyo: 1985), pp. 49-66.

(3) From a recent book by PRC scholars, Chung-kuo shen-hua (Chinese Myths), ed. by Yuan K'o (Peking: 1987), p. 223. See my book review article (finished and submitted) "The Chinese Frog Princess: Recent PRC Studies on Chang-o (the Moon Goddess)."

(4) As noted by Alan Dundee in the introductory remarks preceding his own essay, in Alan Dundee ed., Sacred Narratives (Berkeley: University of California, 1984), p. 271.

(5) From Aston's translation of the Nihongi I.10 as cited in Theodore de Bary ed., Sources of Japanese Tradition, vol. 1 (New York, University of Columbia, 1958), p. 25. Paragraph division eliminated.

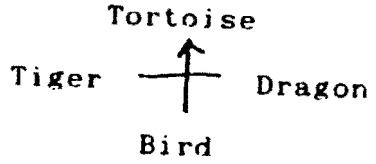
(6) Anna Birgitta Rooth, "The Creation Myths of the North American Indians," in Alan Dundee ed., Sacred Narratives, p. 169. There are more typical elements to follow, but since they are not relevant to this account, I have not included the whole passage, or the role of the raven, Ibid., p. 170. . . . The length of time the hero labored could also have caused his death, as it could have with Yu.

(7) Marija Gimbutas, The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe: Myths and Cult Images 6500-3500 B.C.. (University of California Press: Berkeley & Los Angeles; new and updated edition, 1982), p. 236.

(8) See note 2 above; but I am revising that thesis on the meaning on the number of legs, and will discuss that in a longer article, now under preparation, on decoding the myth of Ho Po, the River God.

(9) The script for t'ien, Heaven, is a picture of a giant. Although it is not the central deity in earlier Shang oracle bones -- when the Lord on High, or Shang-ti, was the highest deity -- the word t'ien was probably in the script ta, for "what is great".

(10) In the expanded placement of the animals of the Four Directions, the Bird now ends up in the South, in opposition to the Tortoise as Tiger, and Dragon now divides autumn and spring.



(11) See my essay on the Chinese Frog Princess (note 2 above), on the fertility symbolism of the frog. We still can find, on some shelf in an old Chinese medicine shop, the Dark Warrior or, even more often, the Twin Frogs.

(12) In the future, I will be working on the meaning of deformities, in an article on "Myths, Metaphors, Metamorphosis."

(13) What is translated in English as the "mystic female", in the Tao-te-ching, refers back, in Chinese, not the the later popular twins within the Yin-Yang pair, but to a pair of words for the "animal male, animal female." On the myth of chaos, see Norman J. Girardot's analysis of the hun-tun (chaos, "wanton") myth in his Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism (Berkeley: University of California, 1983).

THE MOTHER OF THE TAO

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The goddess whose biography is translated below is called Holy Mother Goddess (Shengmu yuanjun 聖母元君) by Du Guangting 杜光庭 (850-933) in his collection of immortal ladies' biographies, the Yongcheng jixian lu 墉城集仙錄(Record of the Host of the Immortals of the Walled City; DZ 783, fasc. 560-561).[1] She is the one who bore the Highest Venerable Lord (Taishang laojun 太上老君) in his transformation as the historical philosopher Laozi on this earth. She is also his teacher who advises him in regard to the task he has for the salvation of humankind. Beyond that, Laozi's mother is the representative of the Tao as such, a goddess at the dawn of creation, the immediate conglomeration of

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1. Texts in the Taoist Canon (Daozang, abbreviated DZ) are given according to the number of the reduced sixty-volume edition published in Taipei and Kyoto. These numbers coincide with those found in K.M. Schipper, Concordance du Tao Tsang (Paris: Publications de l'Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient, 1975). "Fasc." stands for "fascicle" and refers to the volume number of the 1925 Shanghai reprint of the original canon of 1445 (Zhengtong Daozang).

primordial cosmic energy, in some ways closer to the Tao than Laozi, yet also the Tao herself.

Her vita can be divided into four phases. First, she is the primordial goddess, formed through a merging of original energies, of "all-pervading yin and mysterious harmony." Thus she is formed simultaneously with the very essence of the universe, comes immediately from the source of all creation, from the Tao. As such she is called by a name consisting of two words also used in reference to the Tao, she is the Jade Maiden of Mystery and Wonder (Xuanmiao yunü 玄妙玉女).

Next, she is transformed into a human female and as such gives birth to the god in a small village in the south of China, in the old country of Chu. She becomes pregnant through the intervention of a supernatural agent, i.e., through the essence of the sun which comes down like a shooting star and enters her mouth while she is taking an afternoon nap. Throughout the extensive pregnancy period, she is always joyful and radiant. She gives birth standing upright, holding on to a branch of a plum tree, after which her newborn son takes the family name Li 李. Thus she becomes herself known as Mother Li. Within the realm of heaven, on the other hand, the act of giving birth to the Venerable Lord earns her the title by which she is known best: Holy Mother Goddess.

Third, she is asked by the divine child to explain the basic structure, concepts, and methods of the Taoist teaching. In altogether nine sections, the goddess thereupon discourses on the situation of humanity in this world and on the way to transcendence. Beginning with morality and restraint in physical indulgence, the path leads on to the cultivation of talismans, drugs, and breathing, as well as to the concoction of a cinnabar elixir which will eventually ferry people across to the heavens. As the teacher of the transformed god she is known as the Goddess of the Great One (Taiyi yuanjun 太一元君).

Fourth, finally, she concludes her instruction and is received back by a heavenly cavalcade of flowery chariots and numerous attendants. Having ascended back into the higher ranges of heaven, she takes up her residence there as the Great Queen of Former Heaven (Xiantian taihou 先天太后).

The fact that one and the same goddess is named differently according to her station in life and major function in the salvational process of the Tao, is made very clear by Du Guangting himself:

> The Holy Mother Goddess was the Jade Maiden of Mystery and Wonder as long as she resided in heaven. After she had given birth, she was duly promoted to be Goddess of the Great One. As such she taught the Venerable Lord the basic principles of reforming the world and spreading the true teaching (Daode

zhenjing guangsheng yi (DZ 725, fasc. 440-448) 2.21b.[2]

> After the Holy Mother Goddess had given birth to the Venerable Lord, she climbed on a jade carriage drawn by eight luminaries and, followed by a host of transcendent attendants, ascended into heaven in broad daylight. Under the great Tang dynasty, she was venerated properly and given the title Great Queen of Former Heaven (Daode zhenjing guangsheng yi 2.14a).

Jade Maiden of Mystery and Wonder

The expression "mystery and wonder" goes back to the first chapter of the Daode jing. Here the Tao itself is described as "mysterious and again mysterious, the gate of all wonder." In this sense the expression is used in the title of the text Xuanmiao neipian 玄妙內篇 which is lost to us today and only survives in quotations. On the basis of these fragments it can be assumed that this text represented the standard hagiography of the Venerable Lord in the late Six Dynasties' period.

Beyond the obvious connection of the name Mystery and Wonder with the Daode jing it is likely that its

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2. A similar statement is also found in Youlong zhuan (DZ 774, fasc. 555) 3.8a and Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian houji (DZ 298, fasc. 150) 1.4ab.

choice for the Mother of the Tao in her maiden life was influenced by the name of the mother of the Buddha -- whose actions are closely imitated in the actual birth process as recorded in the text. Queen Maya, in the earliest translations of the life of the Buddha, dated to the second century A.D., is called Miao, in later versions she is usually known as Jingmiao 靜妙 or Qingmiao 清妙.

The first mention of the Mother of the Tao as Jade Maiden of Mystery and Wonder occurs in the Santian neijie jing 三天内解經 (Inner Explanation of the Three Heavens; DZ 1205, fasc. 876) of the early fifth century:[3]

> Intermingling in chaos, the three energies -- mysterious, original, and primordial -- brought forth the Jade Maiden of Mystery and Wonder. After she was born, the mixed energies congealed and formed Laozi who was born from the left armpit of the Jade Maiden (1.2b).

This event occurred in heaven, therefore the virginity of the Jade Maiden was not damaged, her status as a fresh and sprightly representative of the pure Tao remained intact. In the following, the Venerably Lord, a heavenly deity just come into existence from primordial energies coagulated into a female form, goes

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3. On this text and its characterization of Laozi see Schipper 1978 and Zürcher 1980.

about to set up the known universe. He forms nine continents which he populates with human men and women and decrees suitable religions for each area: the Chinese, since they are formed from strong yang energy, receive Taoism; the barbarians in the west and in India, since they are mostly combined from yin energy, are to worship the Buddha; the people of southern Asia, a harmonious mixture of both yin and yang qualities, become believers in these very energies and develop the doctrines of yin and yang.

This accomplished, the Venerable Lord then concentrates on the proper cultural evolution of China. For this purpose he assists every dynasty as a divine imperial adviser or "teacher of the dynasty." However, this marvelous arrangement still declines, and eventually his physical presence in human shape is required on earth.

> In the time of King Wuding of the Shang dynasty, he was born again. He became the son of Mother Li. During the pregnancy of eighty-one years, he continuously recited a sacred scripture. At birth, he ripped open her left armpit. He had white hair when he was born and thus came to be called Laozi, the Old Child. The Scripture of the Three Terraces that we have today is the text Laozi chanted in the womb.
>
> As regards his return to the embryonic state in the womb of Mother Li, it must be understood that he himself transformed his body of pure emptiness into the shape of Mother Li. Then he took refuge in his own

> womb. There was never a real Mother Li. Unaware of this fact, people nowadays say that Laozi was born by Mother Li. Such is not the case (1.3b).

Thus the Jade Maiden finally loses her celestial maidenly position and becomes -- as every good Chinese female must -- a mother, the most important role and sign of ultimate blessedness of a woman. However, since she is ultimately not of this earth, her physical pregnancy has to remain an illusion. One conglomeration of energy brings forth another conglomeration of energy, the physical forms they take on are merely appearances, the reality underneath, the true Tao, is formless. The myth of the birth of Laozi in this world is therefore a clear and illustrative expression of one of the most fundamental doctrines of the teaching.

Mother Li

The earliest information regarding the historical Laozi which is generally accepted as standard is found in chapter 63 of the Shiji 史記 (Record of the Historian) of the first century B.C.:

> Laozi was a native of Quren hamlet in the Li village of Hu district in the state of Chu. His surname was Li, his personal name Er, and he was styled Dan. His was a historian in charge of the archives of the Zhou.

When Confucius went to Zhou to ask to be instructed in the rites by Laozi ...

Laozi cultivated the Tao and the Virtue. He taught that one should efface oneself and be without fame in the world. He lived under the Zhou. After a long time he realized that the dynasty was declining. He decided to leave. When he reached the western frontier, Yin Xi, the guardian of the pass, said: "You want to withdraw forever. Please write down your ideas for me." Thereupon Laozi wrote a book in two sections dealing with the Tao and the Virtue. It had more than five thousand words. Then he left, and nobody knows what became of him.

According to one tradition, Laolaizi was also a native of the state of Chu. He wrote a book in fifteen sections, setting forth the applications of the Taoist school, and was contemporary with Confucius. Laozi probably lived to over a hundred and sixty years of age -- some even say over two hundred -- as he cultivated the Tao and was able to live to a great age.

A hundred a twenty-nine years after the death of Confucius [479 B.C.], it was recorded by a historian that Dan, the Historian of the Zhou, had a audience with Duke Xian of Qin during which he said: "In the first instance, Qin and Zhou were united, and after being united for five hundred years they separated, but seventy years after the separation a great feudal lord is going to be born." According to some, Dan was none other than Laozi, but according to others, this was not so. The world has no way of knowing where the truth lay. In any case, Laozi was a gentleman who lived in retirement from the world.

> The son of Laozi was named Zong. He served as a general in the army of the state of Wei and was given the fief of Duan'gan. Zong's son was Zhu, Zhu's son was Gong, and Gong's great-grandson was Jia. Jia was an official in the time of Emperor Wen of the Han dynasty [179-156 B.C.]. His son Jie was Tutor to Ang, Prince of Jiaoxi, and as a result made his home in Qi" (Shiji 63; Lau 1982: X-XI; Fung 1953: I/170).

This biography includes information on four distinct people: a person called Li from the south of China, a historian in the archives of the Zhou, a ritual master who met and taught Confucius, and a saint Laolaizi who wrote a book in fifteen sections. None of these was the philosopher Laozi, none of these can be properly grasped historically. What can be said is that the genealogy of the Li clan, as it is outlined in the third to last paragraph of the biography, and thereby the family name Li of the ancient philosopher was added to the information during the Han dynasty, when the Li family decided to adopt Laozi as their illustrious ancestor, quite a common practice in ancient China (cf. Seidel 1969: 19).

Historically, Mother Li therefore received her name only after the Li clan had decided to adopt her famous son -- who by then was venerated increasingly as a deity. As a universal god and identical with the Tao itself, Laozi is described first in the Laozi ming 老子銘 (Inscription for Laozi), dated to September 24,

165 AD. It was compiled at the occasion of formal imperial rites offered to the cosmic Laozi in the birthplace of the "historical" Laozi, i.e., in Hu in the south of China.[4]

A similar picture of Laozi is found in the Laozi bianhua jing 老子變化經 (Scripture of the Transformations of Laozi), a Dunhuang manuscript dated to the second century AD (S. 2295). Rather than an official court statement, this text is the expression of one of the popular messianic cults that sprang up toward the end of the Han dynasty in southwest China. Laozi here is the savior of humanity, the creative and ordering power of the universe which has come down again and again as "teacher of the dynasty" to change human and natural life for the better. Laozi is the Tao, and the Tao has always helped the rulers to maintain and perfect harmony in the world. It has come down under various names and revealed numerous scriptures, and since it has always come down to save people, it will do so again. This text is the first to mention Mother Li and to indicate the supernatural nature of the transformation. It describes the birth as follows:

Vague and undifferentiated.

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4. For details see the works of Anna Seidel: 1969, 1978, 1978a.

> From this the heavenly and the earthly are being created.
> Its spirit assumes form in the womb of Mother Li.
> Changing his body until the time of happy destiny has come.
> After 72 years in his mother's womb, he appears in the country of Chu.

At the same time, Mother Li receives a temple of her own and an official statement is engraved on a stele in front of it. Here another encomium for the cosmic Laozi is found, very similar to the passage just quoted. Dated by Kusuyama to 153 A.D. (1979: 324), but possibly later, the Shengmu bei 聖母碑(Stele for the Holy Mother) was seen and recorded by Li Daoyuan 李道源in the Shuijing zhu 水經注(A Commentary to the River Classic; ch. 23). In the sixth century, it was therefore placed near the temple dedicated to Mother Li in Zhenyuan, the place of the birth. Here it is said:

> Laozi, the Tao:
> Born prior to the Shapeless,
> Grown before the Beginningless,
> Living in the Prime of Great Immaculate,
> Floating freely through the Six Voids.
> He passes in and out of obscurity and confusion,
> Contemplating chaos as yet undifferentiated,
> And viewing the clear and turbid in union.

While Mother Li was thus the object of a cult that had sprung up around Laozi and his birthplace possibly as early as the second century A.D., her position is

further strengthened in later texts. In the biography of Laozi contained in Ge Hong's 葛洪 Shenxian zhuan 神仙傳 (Biographies of Spirit Immortals) of the fourth century, a variety of different accounts are referred to, some even slightly scandalous. The folklore around the philosopher/god growing rapidly, he is said to have emerged from the left armpit of Mother Li, then not yet properly married, who became pregnant after having been touched by a shooting star.

> Laozi's name was Chonger or Boyang. He was a native of Quren hamlet in Hu district in Chu. His mother became pregnant when she was touched by a large shooting star. Despite of his heavenly origin, Laozi thereby yet made his appearance in the Li family. ...
>
> There are also stories that his mother bore him for 72 years. At birth he emerged from her left armpit. He had white hair and thus was named Laozi.
>
> There are reports that Laozi's mother had not been married and therefore he had to take on his mother's family name.
>
> Yet again, some say that his mother stood beneath a plum tree when she gave birth. Being able to speak upon birth, the sage then pointed to the tree and said: "This will be my surname" (ch. 1).

Another account of the birth is found in the Daode zhenjing xujue 道德真經序訣, a commentary to the Daode jing that survives as a Dunhuang manuscript (S.

75, P. 2370) and allegedly goes back to Ge Hong's uncle Ge Xuan 玄:

> Laozi descended to the world again and entrusted himself to the womb of Mother Li. He split open her left side to be born. At birth, his hair was white and so he came to be called Laozi.
>
> The name Laozi sprang first from the mystery, it means that he was before heaven and earth, never knowing any old age or decline. Thus he was called Laozi, and all people said that Laozi himself only came during the Chou, but that his name had originated before countless kalpas, in darkness and mystery.

Holy Mother Goddess

In the following centuries, the semi-historical and increasingly fanciful account of Mother Li is then integrated with the myth of the celestial Jade Maiden and the traditional account of the birth of the Buddha to create the Holy Mother Goddess of Du Guangting. Our first documentary evidence of this integration is the Santian neijie jing already mentioned above. This text also integrates the story of the conversion of the barbarians, i.e., that Laozi after leaving China as he allegedly did when the Zhou dynasty declined (see the biography in the Shiji quoted above) went all the way to India and became the Buddha, thus converting the western peoples to Taoism in a new guise. For the

birth of Laozi this means that he is born again, this time with all the trimmings of the hagiography of the Buddha's birth. Following the above cited passage about the illusory existence of Mother Li, the text continues:

> In the time of King You of the Zhou, Laozi realized that the dynasty was doomed to decay. With disheveled hair and feigning madness, he excused himself from the Zhou and left. Travelling in an ox cart and moving towards the west, he reached the pass in the Zhongnan mountains. Here he transmitted the Scripture of High, Middle, and Low in one scroll and the Scripture in Five Thousand Words in two scrolls to Yin Xi, the Guardian of the Pass. Thus he parted with altogether three scrolls.
>
> When Yin Xi received these texts, his Tao was perfected. Laozi with the eyes of the Tao saw far west into the country of the barbarians. He observed that they were aggressive and violent and completely lacked culture. ...
>
> The wife of the king of India was called Qingmiao. Once when she was taking an afternoon nap, Laozi ordered Yin Xi to stride on a white elephant and change into a yellow sparrow. In such shape he then flew right into the mouth of the Queen. To her it looked like a shooting star coming down from heaven.
>
> In the following year, on the eighth day of the fourth month, he split open her right hip and was born.

> Having hardly touched the ground, he took seven steps. Raising his right hand to heaven he exclaimed: "The chief I am above and under heaven. The three worlds are nothing but pain. What is there enjoyable?" He later realized that all birth is suffering and became a Buddha. From that time onward, Buddhism began to flourish in those areas.... (1.2b-4b).

While according to the Santian neijie jing it is Yin Xi who becomes the Buddha, Laozi himself is described in this role in the Xuanmiao neipian. Here the story runs:

> Laozi entered the pass and went all the way to India. The wife of the king of India was called Jingmiao. When she took an afternoon nap, Laozi strode on the essence of the sun and entered her mouth.
>
> On the 8th day of the 4th month of the following year, he emerged through her left armpit. It was midnight. Having barely touched the ground, he took seven steps. From then on the Buddhist teaching came to flourish (Gu Huan, Yixia lun; Zhen Luan, Xiaodao lun, T. 52, 148b).

Both versions literally quote the story of the Buddha's birth, more specifically the Taizi ruiying benqi jing 太子瑞應本起經(Sutra of the Original Life of the Prince in Accordance with All the Good

Omens; T. 3, 472-483)[5] which was translated by Zhi Qian 支謙 in the third century.

In the Buddhist text, the three basic phases of the Buddha's birth are embellished with a variety of motifs, all of which in due course become standard in the myth concerning Laozi. First, the conception is controlled by the later Buddha himself who changes into a white elephant and appears to his mother in a dream. He is surrounded by the essence of the sun. During the entire pregnancy the sun continues to shine and the Buddha himself radiates with a strong light upon birth. Celestial motifs such as the essence of the sun and the shooting star are found plentiful in the hagiography of Laozi, influenced certainly by Buddhist sources, but also by traditional Chinese mythology which associated mythical heroes with celestial and especially light phenomena.

Second, in the phase of pregnancy, heaven reveals its delight by producing exceptional bounty on earth. The Queen shows her participation in the divine through her continuous joy. In the Taoist version, she is depicted as being of extraordinary beauty and never tiring energy.

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5. The abbreviation "T." stands for Taisho Tripitaka, the 1912 edition of the Buddhist Canon. References are given by volume and page number.

Third, the actual birth is miraculous and pure, the just-born bodhisattva is able to walk and to speak. He speaks the classical words: "The chief I am above and under heaven. The three worlds are nothing but pain. What is there enjoyable?" The gods of heaven come down to show their respect and perform purification rites for the child. The dragon kings bring rain and bathe him. The motif of the dragons is already found in connection with the birth of emperors and heroes in traditional Chinese mythology, as much as purification by means of water is a standard practice. By the time Du Guangting writes his version of the myth, all these motifs are fully integrated into the sacred account of the birth of Laozi and therefore the life of the Holy Mother Goddess.

Goddess of the Great One

The Great One originally is a philosophical concept in ancient Taoist thought. Here it may refer to the primordial state of the world before things and beings were created, the principle according to which creation took (and still takes) place, the primordial force of creation, that which sustains all life; as such it is a power, a material energy. Moreover, "oneness" is the basic characteristic of all there is, an abstract characteristic of existence. Occupying a

central position in the process of creation, the One is the first stage of the gradually coagulating Tao. As the Daode jing has it:

> The Tao produced the One;
> The One produced the two
> The two produced the three;
> The three produced the myriad beings (42).

In the Zhuangzi 莊子 we find:[6]

> In the Great Beginning there was non-being;
> There was no being, no name.
> Out of it arose the One.
> Thus there was One, but it had no form.
> Beings realized and came to life.
> This was called their life-force (ch. 12).

The Great One as a personified god has been most commonly venerated as an astral deity in the official state cult of China. It was due to the advice of a court magician that the god of the Great One was installed as the god of the center of the universe during Han times. As the Great One became the highest god in the official cult, the five mythical emperors associated with the five agents and five directions that had been inherited from former dynasties were relegated to the position of his attendants. At that

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6. The Zhuangzi is quoted according to A Concordance to Chuang-tzu, Harvard-Yenching Institute Sinological Index Series, Supplement no. 20 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956).

time the Yellow Emperor lost his central position and was established in the southwest.

Before the Han dynasty the god of the Great One is mentioned in the Chuci 楚辭 (The Songs of the South) as the mythical god of the East. Even during the Han the Great One was especially associated with the south of China. Emperor Wu offered a sacrifice to him before embarking on a campaign against the southern states. He also fought under a banner which showed the sun, the moon, and the Northern Dipper, as well as the Great One in the shape of a flying dragon (Shiji 28).[7]

The Goddess of the Great One appears first in the late Tang dynasty in Du Guangting's hagiography of the Holy Mother Goddess. However, she inherits the characterization of the god of the center and the most powerful deity of the universe. To characterize her as such Du relies primarily on a description of the Primal Lord (Yuanjun 元君) in Ge Hong's Baopuzi 抱朴子 (Book of the Master Who Embraces Simplicity) who is even then acknowledged as the teacher of Laozi:

> The Primal Lord was Lao Dan's teacher... He is chief of the gods and immortals, and can claim to harmonize yin and yang. He gives

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7. For more details regarding the Great One in Taoist thought and meditation practice see my "Guarding the One: Concentrative Meditation in Taoism," forthcoming in Livia Kohn (ed.), Taoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan, Center for Chinese Studies Publications).

> orders to ghosts, gods, wind, and rain. He drives nine dragons and twelve white tigers. All the immortals of the world are his subordinates, ..." (4.7b; Ware 1966: 79-80).
>
> The scriptures of the gods and immortals are unanimous in their account that both the Yellow Emperor and Lao Dan studied under the Primal Lord of the Great One in order to receive his secrets (13.3a; Ware 1966: 216).

As the teaching aspect of the mother goddess, the Goddess of the Great One has a biography in the Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian houji 歷世真仙體道通鑑後集 (Supplement to the Comprehensive Mirror Through the Ages of Realized Immortals and Those Who Have Embodied the Tao; DZ 298, fasc. 150), where the following meeting between her and Laojun is related:

> The Venerable Lord wandered far off to mountains and through swamps on search of the true canons of purifying the spirits and reverting the cinnabar. When he had almost passed Laoshan, the Goddess of the Great One appeared to him riding a five-colored unicorn and waited upon by numerous divine attendants.
>
> The Venerable Lord advanced to her and asked about the Tao. The Goddess said: "The essentials of the Tao are just cinnabar mutation and the golden fluid." With these words she gave him the secrets.
>
> After several years they met again on Lishan. The Goddess of the great One then declined to

reveal the methods of the divine cinnabar. She said:

"I am chief of all the immortals, queen of the wonderful Tao. The mysterious and numinous secret arts are all part of the Great Origin. How could I disgrace myself by revealing them?"

The Venerable Lord countered: "Among the common people, there is not one who would really know about death. So many people beat their breasts and cry bloody tears. To see their misery stirs my compassion, I want to give them divine medicine. Don't you think it should be possible that all men live long?"

The Goddess replied: "It is not possible. To live with the Tao is very difficult, one must be very wise to do so. One must become a pious, obedient, and truly sincere person.

"Heaven brings forth the myriad beings with good and bad traits. The good traits must be multiplied, the bad traits eradicated. It is not sufficient just to give men some medicine and make them all live long. But you already know these things, you should be careful not to leak out the secrets."

The Venerable Lord practiced the divine Tao of the immortals himself. He wanted to establish the methods for future generations to learn. Therefore he practiced visualization of Truth, guarding the One, refining the Cinnabar, and nourishing Breath.

As a result he was then able to hang freely in mid-air, walk on empty space, as well as leave being and enter non-being, following his will according to pleasure. For mortals

> this is hard to imagine. One day he strode on a white deer, rode around the garden once more, and then from a cypress ascended to heaven (1.8b-9a).

Here the Mother of the Tao is the single authority on the foundations and functioning of the universe. She is the true master of all creation and holds the secrets of the Tao in her hands. The emphasis in this narrative on Laozi as the spirited seeker for the Tao who must work hard to attain the goal despite his heavenly origins reflects the overall outlook of Du Guangting's description as well. The underlying religious intention of Tang Taoism becomes clear: all are originally part of the Tao, but all have to realize it fully in religious practice. At the same time, Du depicts the Holy Mother Goddess as benign and compassionate even in her teaching aspect. The Goddess of the Great One, on the other hand, is not protecting or nourishing, but makes it very clear where the real power lies. She teaches, albeit reluctantly at first, and then leaves Laozi as much as all ordinary mortals to struggle for the salvation she will not grant.

Great Queen of Former Heaven

The successful seeker of the Tao, originally a member of the heavenly community, returns to his native abode in the end. So do his teachers, though

undertaking less strenuous efforts in the process. The Mother of the Tao, her earthly mission accomplished, her teaching delivered and hopefully heeded, returns to heaven. Du Guangting describes the scene as follows:

> After the Holy Mother Goddess had finished speaking, immortal officials and spirit attendants arrived with cloudy chariots and feathery canopies. Forest-like they assembled around her. Thereupon she climbed into the chariot of the eight luminaries and ascended to heaven in broad daylight.
>
> The Venerable Lord strode on a white deer and, rising from the top of a cypress, followed the immortal equipage back to the heaven of great Purity. Today one can still see the traces of the deer in the cypress.

In his Daode zhenjing guangsheng yi 道德真經廣聖義 (The Extensive Sagely Meaning of the Daode jing; DZ 725, fasc. 440-448), Du Guangting expressly interprets Laojun's leaving the world:

> He also demonstrates the fact that everyone who practices the wonderful Tao will ascend to heaven. To show his final realization of merits, he climbed on a light carriage and left the world. Today there is still the Cypress of the Deer on the temple ground. This is the very spot where the Venerable Lord strode on the white deer carriage and ascended to heaven (2.13b).

A local legend of a cypress tree with some strange patterning on top is connected with the belief in the instantaneous transformation of the successful

immortal-to-be, quite popular at the time. A well-known and well marked occasion is the transformation of Lad Qu, commonly called Qu Boting 瞿柏庭 who ascended to Heaven in broad daylight in a public occurrence in the fifth month of the year 773. He was at that time 18 years of age and apprenticed to the 15th patriarch of the Highest Clarity school of Taoism, Huang Dongyuan 黄洞元. The event took place in the courtyard of Peach Blossom Monastery (Taohua guan 桃花觀 in full view of monastic and lay onlookers: While holding on to a chestnut tree, Qu's physical form dissolved completely and he vanished into thin air (Sunayama 1987).

In both cases of ascent, the motif of the tree is of central importance -- Laozi striding the deer on its top and the young man grasping it just as the Mother of Tao grasped the branch of the plum tree when delivering her child. In many ways the scene suggests that a new birth is taking place. While the human birth of the god is his transformation from a heavenly plane into a mundane shape, the ascent of the successful practitioner is his translation into a celestial being. This interpretation is born out by a comment Du makes in his Daode zhenjing guangsheng yi:

> In the year when the holy Tang dynasty received the mandate of heaven, a withered cypress in Bo near Laozi's old home began to blossom anew. Thus the tree was entitled Cypress of New Birth (2.14b).

Once established in his or her new identity, the recently transformed is given a new name, or posthumous title, as mundane perspective would have it. As a resident and possibly administrative official in heaven, he or she takes on a new role as guide and protector of living beings everywhere. The fully realized immortal is thus in many ways similar to the ancestor who takes up his residence above the clouds and continues, with a new title and from a new perspective, to help out his near and dear ones for generations to come. The Mother Goddess, once promoted to ancestress, is then known as the Great Queen of Former Heaven.

And just as some form of worship is organized around the grave and the ancestral tablet of any deceased householder, so the ascent of Laozi and the Mother Goddess give rise to cultic and miraculous activity in the area.

> After Laojun had ascended to heaven, various emperors throughout history venerated and honored his traces. Thus emperors Xuan of the Han and Wen of the Sui both had temples and halls erected in his honor. Moreover, they ordered their officials of culture to compose stone inscriptions with the aim of preserving the divine deeds for eternity. Therefore we have the Laozi ming by the Han

official Bian Shao and the stele inscribed by Xue Daoheng of the Sui.[8]

> In the old village of Zhenyuan, several old and inclining trees were suddenly full of sweet dew. Looking up one could see a cloud hovering over them for some time. Then a realized one appeared and put an end to all witchery in the area. Also, clouds and mist coagulated in the air and engulfed palaces and houses. Another time, divine birds appeared carrying arrows in their beaks, magic snow was whirling about, spirit dragons danced in the middle of the nine wells, and characters were visible on the top of the cypress (2.14b).

More than that and in the same way as one would expect of one's ancestors, the heavenly beings take good care to preserve their old home intact. Especially during various uprisings in the ninth century, veritable spirit armies came down to defend the sacred birthplace of the Venerable Lord:

> The rebel Pang Xun wanted his followers to occupy the Temple of Great Purity, dedicated to the Venerable Lord. But the god created a black vapor which hid the river and made the rebels lose their way. They suffered great defeat on that day.

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8. The Laoziming of the Han is dated to September 24, 165. It is translated and discussed in Seidel 1969: 121 and Seidel 1978: 39. See also Kusuyama 1956. The Laoshi bei of the Sui has not been translated to date. It is found in Wenyuan yinghua, ch. 848.

> Between 880 and 885, Huang Chao[9] invaded and occupied the temple area. Wantonly his men put fire to the place, but a dark cloud rose and spread rain immediately so that the fire was extinguished. The rebels fled towards the river.
>
> Later the rebels again haunted the area and surrounded and attacked Bozhou with knives drawn. A black vapor and heavy snow arose, leaving the invaders dropped dead or frozen on the ground. As soon as the area was liberated, the vapor vanished.
>
> When the remainders of Huang Chao's troops attacked Bozhou once more, spirit birds gathered all around town with arrows in their beaks and another black cloud arose over the residence of the local official. Terrified, the rebels fled and were never seen again (2.15ab).

In her role as divine ancestress, as Great Queen of Former Heaven, the Mother of the Tao has therefore returned to her high position in heaven, yet she has also reached a new rank. Her activity now consists in protecting the place of her earthly involvement, in encouraging Taoists and prospective immortals to persist in their auspicious undertaking. No longer a Jade Maiden preparing for the role of motherhood, no longer a Mother Goddess who gives birth to the highest

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9. For more information on the rebellion of Huang Chao mentioned in the citation see Miyakawa 1974.

deity of the religion as a human female, no longer even the ruler of the universe and teacher of its most arcane secrets, she has accomplished all and gone to her destination.

The different life phases and names of the Mother of the Tao correspond neatly to the major roles of women in traditional Chinese society. There is first of all the daughter, the young girl who is considered pure and clear and is educated to serve in her husband's household with chastity and efficiency. Then there is the mother, crowning achievement in the life of woman, especially when the baby is male and can therefore carry on the family line. The role of the teacher, third, is usually incompatible with motherhood, since the classical female teachers in ancient China were masters in the arts of the bedchamber, such as the famous Dark Girl who teaches the Yellow Emperor. Educated women as a rule were dancers and consorts, not respectable but available and of central importance in many a man's career. Last, then the role of the matriarch, in human society first played late in life when the clan is prosperous and grand- and great-grandchildren grow up boisterously around her; later, then, continued after death in the role of the ancestress, the guardian and protector of the family to come.

TRANSLATION[10]

[1a] The Holy Mother Goddess became human through a conglomeration of the breath of all-pervading yin and mysterious harmony.[11] Also named Jade Maiden of Mystery and Wonder, she is the teacher of the Emperor on High.

The Highest Venerable Lord nourished his spirit in Before Heaven and, perpetually transforming himself for several kalpas, he appeared and disappeared according to given occasion.[12] It cannot be adequately described.

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10. The following translation renders the first biography contained in Yongcheng jixian lu by Du Guangting (850-933), which is found in DZ 783, fasc. 560-561. The characters for all Chinese texts quoted in the annotation are listed below in the Glossary.

11. The description of the Holy Mother as a conglomeration of breath is first found in Santian neijie jing (DZ 1205, fasc. 876; 1.2b). The title shengmu occurs first in the Bowuzhi of the fourth century: "There was a woman called Du who practiced shamanistic rituals and conversed with spirits.... After she died a temple was erected for her worship and she came to be called Holy Mother of the Eastern Hill." The quote is found in Hou Hanshu, "Junguo zhi." In later popular cults a similar figure is found called "Eternal Venerable Mother," cf. Overmyer 1984: 353.

12. The appearance and disappearance of Laozi are commonly known as his "Transformations". The

He wished to reveal himself alive among men, to manifest the fact that beings have a beginning. Therefore he dispersed his bodily form, let go of his spirit, and took refuge in the womb of the Mother Goddess to be born anew.[13] Formerly, in the kalpa Miaomang he had already been born on Heaven's Mound in the Mountains of Numinous Mirror.[14]

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oldest text on these transformations is the Laozi bianhua jing (S.2295) which is dated to the Latter Han and has been translated by Seidel 1969: 60-73. In addition, much material on Laozi's transformations has been collected by Yoshioka 1959: 1-253. He gives a table of the most commonly accepted transformations on pp. 159-168.

13. This motif is originally found in Santian neijie jing 2.3a. Du Guangting explains the meaning of the individual motifs in his Daode zhenjing guangsheng yi (DZ 725, fasc. 440-448):

> The Great Tao adopted the movement of perpetual change and took refuge among men (2.11b).
> The Venerable Lord took birth because he felt compassion for the demoralized world in which the Great Tao was no longer followed. Thus he committed himself to take birth as a man in order to save mankind (2.13a).

14. There is a mangmiao in Zhuangzi 20/7/9 as a synonym for Hundun or primeval chaos. Tiangang is the name of a constellation mentioned in the second chapter of the Zhouyi cantongqi. The "Numinous Mirror" is the instrument that would be used by adepts of alchemy when they entered the mountain. Cf. Baopuzi 17.2a2.

In the 8th year of the 18th king of the Shang dynasty, Yangjia, which was a gengshen year, the Venerable Lord strode on the sun and his essence mounted nine dragons. Gradually his energy haze shrank to the size of a nine colored pearl. In such shape the Venerable Lord came down from heaven and took refuge in the womb of the Mother Goddess.[15]

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15. For the problem of the dating of Laojun's birth and conception see below. His conception through "essence of the sun" goes back to Buddhist sources. It is first found in the description of the conception of the Buddha in the Taizi ruiying benqi jing (T. 3, 473b). Here it is said:

> When the bodhisattva began to descend he changed into a white elephant capped by the essence of the sun.

The motif occurs again in Santian neijie jing 1.3b when

> Laozi ordered Yin Xi to stride on a white elephant and change into a yellow sparrow.

Du Guangting explains the motif in the Guangsheng yi:

> He strode on the essence of the sun and shaped it into a pearl of five colors. This fact illustrates his quality of yang energy. The Tao rode on a chariot of nine dragons. Shrinking in size, they adopted the shape of five-colored light rays. As such they flowed down to earth

[1b] The Goddess then lived in a small village called Quren in the southern country of Chu. It was located in Hu county, Lei district, on the bank of the river Huo.[16] One afternoon she took a nap when she had the feeling of the sun pouring in like the light of a shooting star. It went right into her mouth and she became pregnant.[17]

> and into the mouth of the Jade Maiden. This shows his pure essence of Yang and nine dragons" (2.12a).

16. His birthplace is the one thing that has not been discussed or altered through the ages. The information given here goes back to the oldest biography of Laozi in Shiji 63, cf. Fung/Bodde 1953: I/171. See also Seidel 1969 and Yoshioka 1959. The Guangsheng yi supplies some additional data (2.13b-14a):

> His birthplace is in the district Hu in the old country of Chu and named after the local city. The community was called Lai after a river flowing by. The village Quren is west of the nine springs mentioned above, on the river Linghan. The district was originally called Hu,but from the Han and Wei onward, it was named Guyang. In the first year of Qienfeng (666), this was again changed to Zhenyuan. In the second year Zhonghe (882), it was promoted to be called Ji.

17. The motif of the shooting star occurs first in Ge Hong's Shenxian zhuan: "Laozi's mother got pregnant when touched by a large shooting star." The motif of the impregnating through swallowing is an old motif in Chinese mythology: the ancestress

During the ensuing pregnancy of 81 years, there was always a wonderful perfumed odor and a brilliance of the sun and the moon around her residence. It was as if spirit brightness was protecting her body. Her appearance was beautiful and relaxed, and she was never weak or lazy.[18]

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of Shang became pregnant when she swallowed the egg of a swallow sent to her by Digu (Chuci, "Tianwen;" Hawkes 1959: 30. Eberhard 1942: 367 gives several other instances, among which one version of the myth is told about the birth of Yu who in several respects is the mythological model for Laojun. The same story is also told in the Shangyuan jing (S. 2353), Yoshioka, I, 110.

Although the notion that he strode on the essence of the sun goes back to Buddhist sources, here he enters through the right hip, not through the mouth. In the earlier version of the Taizi ruiying benqi jing (translated by Zhi Qian in the first half of the 3rd century), the Xiuxing benqi jing (translated around 197 by a team of three, the Indians Danguo and Zhu Dali and the Sogdian Kang Mengxiang) the scene is accompanied by celestial music.

18. The earliest accounts of Laozi's birth as Laojun give 72 years as the duration of pregnancy: Laozi bianhua jing, Shenxian zhuan, Xuanmiao neipian.

The Guangsheng yi (2.12a) explains that 81 refers to the fact that he "fulfills the number of ultimate Yang, 9 x 9."

The various wonderful signs accompanying the pregnancy are all "the extraordinary signs of the

In the gengchen year, i.e., the 9th year of the reign of Wuding, 22nd king of the Shang, on the 15th day of the 2nd month,[19] the Holy Mother Goddess gave

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sage taking birth," claims the Guangsheng yi (2.12a).

19. This problem has been mainly dealt with by Kusuyama 1976: 12-30 and 1979: 373-81.

1. The later standard pattern with which we are dealing here is first found in the Huahu jing (S. 1857, dat. around 725). It was -- according to Kusuyama -- established by the Laozi biographer Yin Wencao in the late 7th century.

2. Before the Tang, Laozi's excursion to the West was dated to the reign period of King Yu, the last king of the Western Zhou, i.e., the eighth century B.C. The earliest reference to this is found in the Santian neijie jing of the early fifth century. According to the Liexian zhuan and the Gaoshi zhuan, Laozi was born at the end of the Shang to be the teacher of the Zhou.

3. The original idea is that the historical Laozi lived as a contemporary of Confucius and then left for the West.

Note: the pattern found in 1. is found on the biography of the Buddha. the Buddha's birth was dated traditionally in accordance with wonderful signs observed on the western sky to either 689 B.C. in relation to the Zuozhuan, or 1029 B.C. in relation to the Mu tianzi zhuan. The earlier dating was first made official in the debate of Buddhists vs. Taoists of 520 in Northern China. The Buddhists established the year 1029 BC as the Buddha's birth date to refute the claim of the Taoists in the later destroyed Laozi kaitien jing

birth to the Venerable Lord through her left side, holding on to plum branch.[20]

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that the Buddha was a follower of Laozi having gone west (see T. 52, 403a).

In order that Laozi could have been born as the Buddha or ordered Yin Xi to become the Buddha,, he must have left China before 1029 BC, i.e., Zhao Wang 24 (some versions have Zhao 26). Thus his travel to the West is dated to Zhao 25 (or 27), which necessitates a birth some time before that, preferable at the end of the Shang. The most commonly given dates are Yangjia 17 (not 8 as given here) for his conception, and Wuding 9 for his birth.

The date of birth, 15th day of the 2nd month is the date of the nirvana of the Buddha.

20. The emergence of the sage through the left side shows that also "his manner is first found in the Santian neijie jing 1.2b: "Laozi was born from the left armpit", also found in Shenxian zhuan. The Buddha, according to Taizi ruiying bengi jing T. 3, 473b, emerges from the right hip of his mother, and so does Yin Xi as the Buddha according to the Santian neijie jing 1.4b.

Another early text that gives this version of Laozi's birth is the Xujue ascribed to Ge Xuan, but which actually stems from the 5th century (S. 1585).

The motif of holding on to a branch is equally present both in the old Taoist sources and as well as in the Buddhist texts. The Shenxian zhuan mentions that "his mother stood beneath a plum tree when she gave birth to him." The Xiuxing jing says

At this moment, nine dragons sprang from the earth[21] and ascended dancing into the sky. They spat forth water to bathe the Venerable Lord. Where these nine dragons had risen from the earth, nine wells gushed forth. These are still there to this day. One finds them in the Temple of Great Purity in Bozhou.[22]

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that Queen Maya held on to a branch giving birth (T. 3, 363a).

21. Bodhisattavas rising from the earth is a motif in the Lotus sutra.

22. The appearance of dragons upon birth of the sage is an important motif of the birth story of the Buddha. Many different supernatural beings come to attend on him according to the Xiuxing benqi jing (T. 3, 463c). The Taizi ruiying has:

> At this moment (after his birth), heaven and earth were shaken by a great commotion, and the whole palace was illuminated in a flash. Brahma, Sakra, and the gods of all the heavens came down, appearing in the sky to wait upon the bodhisattva. The four Maharajas (heavenly kings) erected a golden bench and bathed the prince with heavenly fragrant water (T. 3, 473c).

The Guangsheng yi gives some more details, regarding the local wells:

> He desired to show that the wonderful Tao lies in cultivating merit. Therefore he refined the cinnabar with the intention of exhorting everyone to practice

Upon birth the Venerable Lord was able to walk. He strode forward nine paces and under each step he took a lotus flower [2a] sprouted forth in support of his foot.[23] The sun and the moon bathed him in their brilliance, myriads of numinous beings cam down to wait upon him. He pointed at the plum tree and said, "This will be my surname." Thus he came to be named Li. Because of this, his contemporaries came to call the Holy Mother Goddess Mother Li.[24]

> cultivation. Today there is still a spring and also a cypress of "Refining the Cinnabar" in the temple of Bozhou
>
> When he was born, numerous cranes soared through the sky and nine dragons spat forth water to bathe his sagely body. Where these nine dragons had risen from the earth, nine springs gushed forth -- they can today still be seen in the Temple of great Purity in Zhenyuan, Bozhou (2.13a.)

23. These are the actions of the Buddha. See T. 3, 463c and 473c. Here, however, only seven steps are taken, and lotus is not specifically mentioned.

24. Historically speaking, Laozi received his surname only during the Han when a powerful clan wanted to align themselves with him (Seidel 1969: 19). The notion that he chose his surname after the plant to which his mother held on while giving birth is first found in the Shenxian zhuan, and has been continued throughout the tradition.

    However, there are a few sidelines or variants of the story how Laozi got his surname. The

After having completed the nine steps, he pointed at the sky with his left hand, and at the earth with his right. He exclaimed: "The chief I am above and

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Guangsheng yi 2.19a-20a quotes the Lishi dazong pu according to which Laozi was born because his mother -- an unmarried virgin -- got pregnant from eating plums (cf. this old motif of swallowing something round and getting pregnant from it).

Guangsheng yi 2.17b-18a quotes the Datang tianyen yudie to the extent that Laozi changed his surname which was originally Li to Li (plum) because he ate mostly plums when he took refuge in the waste of Yihou under Emperor Jie at the end of the Shang.

According to two other texts quoted in the Guangsheng yi, Laozi was born into the Li family from the beginning. His father was called Lingfei, his grandfather Jingbin, and the family had a long tradition of cultivating longevity. In these accounts, the Xuanzhong ji and the Xuanmiao yunü yuanjun neizhuan, Laozi's mother is Yin Xi's daughter, then married to a Mr. Li (Guangsheng yi 2.18b-19a and 20b).

According to the texts, she was the daughter of Mr. Yin of Tianshui. This place in the far west of China, in the ancient state of Qin, is not only the place where Yin Xi's father allegedly took refuge to avoid political unrest and where Yin Xi was therefore born (see Kusuyama 1979: 404). More than that, it is also the place from which Yin Wencao came, the great Laozi-biographer of the early Tang. Kusuyama concludes that the Yin Xi boom to be observed during the Tang goes back to Yin Wencao's desire to promote his family into a position of personal relation with Laozi -- and at the same time with the Tang emperors.

under heaven. The world is nothing but suffering, what is there enjoyable?"[25]

Within three days his body underwent nine changes. It grew to a height of nine feet.[26] The Venerable Lord had gray eyebrows and white hair. On his forehead, he had the protuberance of the sun and the crescent of the moon. His nose had a double rim, and his ears three openings. His face was adorned with beautifully shaped eyebrows and a square mouth, and he showed the sign of lordship on his feet, and the mark of the ruler on his palms. All in all he possessed the 72 divine marks and 81 auspicious characteristics of the sage on his body.[27]

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25. These are the words of the Buddha. See T. 3, 463c with the variant "...I will pacify it." for ... "What is there enjoyable?" See also T. 3, 473c with the variant "...the three worlds are full of suffering."

    In addition, the position of the hands is different: in the Buddhist texts, the sage holds his right hand up to his face, the "heaven-earth" symbolism is missing. See Zürcher 1959: 301.

26. A ninefold change of Laozi in accordance with the sun is already mentioned in the Laozi ming (Seidel 1969: 41; see Seidel 1978: 41, Yoshioka 1959: 26). The symbolism of the number nine here evokes a parallel to the myth of Pangu (Seidel 1969: 63).

27. There is a full list of all the 72 auspicious signs and 81 special characteristics of the sage in Yoshioka 1959: 142-147. He bases his list on

The Holy Mother Goddess called him Old Child, Laozi, because he had white hair when he was born. According to another tradition, he gave himself nine names. Yet another source maintains that he had 36 appellations and 72 normal names.[28]

Youlong zhuan 3.9a-10a and Sandong zhunang 8. According to his enumeration, the following characteristics are mentioned here:

No.s 5, 40, 41, 21, 14, 9, 23, 66, 55; only the first sign, "gray eyebrows" is not mentioned in the standard list. The first occurrence for the signs of Laozi is his biography in the Shenxian zhuan. But similar signs, especially the sun and the moon protuberances on the forehead are ascribed to the sages of antiquity already in the Weishu literature, cf. Yoshioka 1959: 36f).

The 32 signs of the Buddha as mentioned in the Taizi ruiying benqi jing (T. 3, 474a) are very different from these. For an English list of the Buddhist signs cf. Hurvitz 1962, 353ff.
The Guangsheng yi (2.14a) emphasizes that all these signs show Laozi's quality of a great sage.

28. For the nine names of Laozi see Seidel 1969: 65; Yoshioka 1959: 152 gives a comparative list of the various appellations given to Laozi.

Du Guangting in his Guangsheng yi 2.16a explains the mythical and mystical meanings of the name laozi in great detail:

> As to the name given to the sage, Laozi, Old Child, it is usually assumed that it refers to the fact that he remained in the womb for 81 years and had white hair when he was born. The Holy Mother

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Goddess thus named him to show his wonderful nature to the world.

In addition there are five theories regarding this problem:

1. As the appearance of sages on earth is different from that of ordinary man, the Holy Mother wanted to call him "old". But as he had only just been born, she also wanted to call him her "child". Therefore she decided to combine these two words and call him Laozi.

2. This name was chosen to illustrate the nature of the sacred Tao as opposed to the profane. "Old" usually means aged, whereas "child" commonly denotes a young person. Normal people are first young, and gradually grow old, but Laozi started out being old and gained youth. Thus it was intended to clarify the fact that he lived and thereby returned to the root.

3. "Old" refers to his overseeing the host of sages, whereas "child" indicates his giving life to the myriad beings. Thus Laozi acquired both these names, as he was a teacher to the sages and a creator of all beings. He was therefore called "Old Child". This name was given to him when he was born on earth, his actual name Laojun, Venerable Lord, stems from times unknown in the past.

4. The age is called thus to demonstrate his rejection of ending and returning to the beginning. "Old" represents the end of life, "child", on the other hand, its

The Xuanmiao neipian says, "When the Venerable Lord was born, the myriad spirits of heaven and earth cam and assembled in the courtyard. The Sun Lad radiated his brilliance, and the Lady of the Moon sprinkled her florescence. The Seven Primes of the Northern Dipper shone forth vigorously, [2b] and the Three Simplicities filled the area. All kinds of herbs exploded into a bewitching fragrance. On the plain soil, lotus flowers sprouted forth. Divine lads and mysterious maidens lined up on his left and right. The whole atmosphere was full of celestial music, sounding

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beginning. Normal men start at the beginning and gradually proceed toward the end, but Laojun rose from the end and gradually proceeded toward his beginning. He wanted to make all people practice the Tao, repel old age,and return to youthfulness. This is why he acquired the name "Old Child".

5. He radiated the light of harmony to spread the Tao among men. He was called "old", because he had white hair when he was born. He was called zi, "child", "master", because this is a common appellation for philosophers. For instance, Kongzi, Mengzi. Zhuangzi, and Liezi used their surname together with this suffix. And Laozi, Heguanzi, Baopuzi, and Huainanzi called themselves after some outer characteristic.

far into the void. Heavenly melodies reverberated in the empty sky."[29] This is just it.

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29. The earliest quote of this text is found in Gu Huan's Yixia lun of 467 AD. It is also quoted in Zhen Luan's Xiaodao lun relating the story of Laozi's birth in connection with the conversion of the barbarians:

> Laozi crossed the past and went west to Kapilavastu in India. Striding on the essence of the sun, he entered Queen maya through the mouth. On the 6th day of the 4th month, he split open her left armpit and was born. Raising his hands he exclaimed: "In heaven above, on earth below, there is no higher being than me. The three words abound in suffering, how could one ever be joyous?" (T. 52, 154c and 148b)

In addition, the Xuanmiao neipian is quoted in two surviving chapters of the Huahu jing (T. 54, 1266c and 1269c), in the Miaomen youqi 7b (DZ 1123, fasc. 760), in Sandong zhunang 8 (DZ 1139, fasc. 780-782) and in Zhang Shoujie's commentary to the Shiji (cf. Yoshioka 1959: 17).

Taking all these quotes together it appears that the Xuanmiao neipian was the standard hagiography of Laojun before the Tang, relating a similar sequence of events as the Santian neijie jing, and including quite a few Buddhist motifs, such as the celestial music at the birth of the sage mentioned in the quote of our text. This reminds strongly of the music played when the Buddha was conceived according to the Xiuxing benqi jing and Taizi ruiying benqi jing.

The Venerable Lord bowed grace fully to the Holy Mother goddess and begged her to explain the wonderful Tao, so that all living beings might be greatly reformed and perfect truth to be known on earth. The Holy Mother Goddess relaxed and addressed the Venerable Lord in the following manner:

"When I observe this body, I find it exclusively composed of the six jia. These are only borrowed for use. What are the six jia?[30]

"Jiayen, the spirit force of wood, is the bones.
Jiashen, the spirit force of metal, is the teeth and the nails.
Jiaxu, the spirit force of earth, is the flesh.
Jiachen, the spirit force of wind, is the breath.
Jiawu, the spirit force of fire, is the body heat.
Jiazi, the spirit force of water, is the body liquids.

Again, the spirit force of wood is the liver,
the spirit force of fire is the heart,
the spirit force of earth is the spleen,
the spirit force of metal is the lungs,
the spirit force of water is the kidneys,

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30. The liujia, six families are usually either the six major families of the Warring States period or the six philosophic schools: Yin-yang, Confucians, Mohists, Legalists, Nominalists, and Taoists. The expression meant here rather is liujia, "six cyclical jia signs."

and the spirit force of wind is the gall-bladder.[31]

"Therefore, the six jia together make up the human body. Only because of this man has five orbs, six viscera, nine palaces, twelve chambers, four limbs, five sections, triple heater, nine orifices, [3a] 180 joints, 360 bones in his body.[32] It is only because of

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31. The liujia are the six yang-type celestial stems: jiazi, jiayan, jiachen, jiawu, jiashen, jiaxu. They serve for organizing the cosmos like the five agents already under the han (cf. Hanshu shihua zhi). In addition, they are used in divination and calendrics, then called the Dunjia method. For more details cf. Kalinowski 1983.

    In the bibliographical section of the Suishu one finds works according to which theory of the body as consisting of the liujia seems to have been current then: Liujia quantai shu. In addition, one says of pregnant women that their bodies hold the liujia.

    The association of the five orbs with the five agents here corresponds to the traditional order found already in the medical classic Huangdi neijing suwen. The sixth one mentioned, the gall-bladder, is usually one of the six viscera together with the stomach, the bladder, the large and small intestines, and the navel (cf. Huangting waijing jing A 56 (DZ 263, fasc. 122-131; 58.9a; on this text see especially Schipper 1975).

32. The description of the human body according to its parts is patterned on Zhuangzi 4/2/16 and on the Cunshen shenfa, as contained in chapter 55 of the Yunji qiqian (hereafter abbreviated YJQQ). The

the six jia that all these are working in proper order. Only because of this man can move and act, see and breathe, eat and drink, speak and talk, distinguish good and evil, and know right and wrong. If one jia is but of tune with the whole, sickness will result.

"All human beings are born at a particular hour, on a particular day, in a particular month of a particular year. On the basis of the constellation of stars and the phases of the moon at this moment, the individual's life span is set. Also whether he or she will be rich or poor, noble or humble and whether he will live long or die early.[33]

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five orbs and six viscera are first found in the medical text Huangdi neijing suwen. For the nine palaces see Huangting neijing jing 9. The twelve chambers correspond to twelve constellations in the sky; they are physiognomical definitions of parts of the face, giving a person's good or bad luck. The four limbs are the arms and legs; the five sections are arms and legs plus the head and trunk (according to Buddhist interpretation). The triple heater can roughly be identified as the oesophagus, the gastric gland, and the urethra (see Huangdi neijing suwen and Maspero 1981: 324); the nine orifices are eyes, ears, nostrils, mouth and the two excretory openings (cf. Zhuangzi 4/2/16); the 180 joints and 360 bones represent the harmony of the human body with the cycle of the sun year (Huainanzi 1).

33. According to the Shuowen 7A.22b, the stars are the essence of all living beings arranged in the sky. In the "Mingyi bian" of the Lunheng man is said to receive qi in order to be born, that is, qi from

"Whenever the six jia assemble, they must also disperse again. Wherever there is life, there is sure to be death. All construction is followed by decay, all rise by decline. This is the eternal course of beings. The body is suffering due to having to decay. The spirit has a set time when it must disperse. Every single life span is so conditioned as to be exhausted eventually. This is terribly frightening, indeed. As long as the spirit is there, one is a man. As soon as it leaves, one turns into a corpse. How can this not be painful?[34]

"However, it has only come to that because the five colors irritate the eyes and they won't be clear. The five tones disturb the ears so that heir perception won't be distinct. The five tastes excite the palate, so that it will be spoilt.[35] Accepting and rejecting [3b] corrupt the mind so that it will flutter unsteadily and waver. Cravings and desires not to be satiated, the spirit is sure to flow out and dissolve.

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the stars as it is distributed by heaven. In accordance with this starry qi, man is then due to become noble or humble, rich or poor.

34. In Zhuangzi 58/22/11 man's life is described as the "coming together of qi." Spirit as the decisive agent of life and death is found in the Xisheng jing (DZ 726, fasc. 449-450; 2.8b and 4.4b).

35. The negative impact of the five colors, sounds, and tastes is already noted in the Daode jing 12.

Hating and loving cannot be checked, and the mind will remain agitated and labored. As long as one does not rid oneself of these as fast as possible, determination and energy dwindle day by day. Thus longevity and one's life span decrease ever more.[36] Is there no way to guard against this?

"The five colors are like a drill jabbing out the eyes.

The five tones are like a hammer blocking up the ears.

The five tastes are like axes cutting the tongue to pieces.

All material goods are a fire burning up the body.

All these are the realm of calamity and misfortune,

the source of distress and harm."

Again, the Goddess said:

"One who values long life begins with his personal body, then reaches out to the family, the village, and so to all under heaven.[37] As a son he will behave with

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36. For the negative affect of cravings and desires see the Zuowang lun (DZ 1036, fasc. 704), esp. pp. 3ab and 5a. "Love, sight, thoughts, and ideas are the thorns and brambles of the mind," and have to be eradicated completely.

37. This concept of cultivating oneself first to then gradually move outward and cultivate the whole empire is found in the "Daxue" chapter of the Liji.

perfect filial piety, as a vassal with perfect loyalty. As a superior he will be all love, as a inferior, all obedience.[38] Colors and tastes thus in harmony, he is with the Tao and matches truth.

"Yet, if one desires long life only for his personal body, continually abides in non-action, evades and avoids all involvements as superior or inferior, and never engages in loyalty or filial piety, nor ever realizes modesty and helpfulness,[39] well, then one will cause the good to become lopsided and the Tao to be perverted. Thereby one will lose virtue.[40] Even

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38. These two Confucian virtues of filial piety and loyalty are connected only from the Han dynasty onward. Cf. Baopuzi 3, 7a4. Zhengao 16 speaks of a perfectly filial and perfectly loyal person.

39. The true realization of the Tao does not lie in sitting cross-legged in the wilderness and staying away from all involvement in society. This idea is first found in Guo Xiang's commentary to the Zhuangzi ch. 1, but the Zuowanglun again and again attacks the hypocrisy of those who claim to have reached some state of detachment and then act in the world with perfect egoism. It says:

> ... there are affairs that cannot be given up by beings or beings one cannot leave alone. Those then have to be cared about with humility, should be attended to with clear perception (8b-9a).

40. Virtue, according to the Zhuangzi (14/5/39) is the life-force of all living things. As opposed to the body, virtue is "what moves the body." L.

though one might be able to abandon all egotistic pleasures, forget all attraction of colors and tastes, and becomes like a withered tree or cold ashes, [4a] yet how could this be sufficiently noble?[41]

"One who cultivates the Tao goes along with all in complete freedom from bondage, he is in harmony with all permanent pervasiveness.[42] For kalpas eternal without end, he strives for the liberation of all beings.[43] This kind of life can really be valued very highly.

Vandermeersch in defined de as "la lumiere du regard interieur guidant le marche sur la voie juste." Together with shen, de is the divine light that illuminates existence from within.

41. The Expression "withered tree and dead ashes" is first found in Zhuangzi 3/2/2, the classical description of the trance state of total oblivion in Taoism. See also Zuowang lun 12a.

42. In the Zhuangzi (29.12.14), one finds the notion that "knowledge is pervaded by the spirit (shentong)." In addition, Zhuangzi 19.6.92 describes the mystical union in terms of "making oneself identical with the Great Thoroughfare (datong)." Changtong like shentong seems to refer to the final state of the mind in mystical union with the Tao, or as used in Buddhist texts, in total absorption or deep samadhi (Soothill 1937: 335).

43. This is the ideal of the bodhisattva: to save all beings before saving oneself.

"Long life is hard to attain, yet one has to begin with loyalty, filial piety, benevolence, and righteousness. When one is firmly established in these virtues, one's merit will extend towards other beings. Then one's life span can be prolonged. On the other hand, a man without these virtues who lives a solitary life in the wilderness and makes trees and stones his companions, will waste his whole life and in the next, sink into deep suffering. As his former crimes have not been atoned for and he does not accumulate new merit now, he might even loose his human form and be reborn as a barbarian, or as an animal, a monster or some other weird creature.[44] Forever will he be separated from the Tao. Is this not extremely pitiful?

"To summarize, if a man succeeds in following the Tao by doing good, he will bring forth joy for all times. If he turns his back on the Tao and sinks into evil, death and suffering will never stop.

"A superior man who accumulates good deeds and realizes long life is a Perfected. Heaven and earth

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44. Rebirth as a barbarian, an animal, a monster, or some other weird creature is a Buddhist concept. Here they are naraka, hell-dweller, tiryagyonigata, beast, preta, hungry ghost, and asura, titan (Hurvitz 1962 :339). (The expression is taken from Mohe zhiguan 5.) The list of unpleasant rebirths is also found in Zhengao 6.

may perish, but the Perfected is not destroyed.[45] Going beyond the three worlds, he freely roams in Highest Purity.[46]

"On the other hand, one evil committed will lead to ten thousand evil deeds. Thus be warned against this.

A man of 1.000 evil deeds will be uncanny and stubborn in a later life. [4b]

A man of 2.000 evil deeds will fall into slavery.

A man of 3.000 evil deeds will contract the six diseases,[47] be orphaned and poor.

A man of 4.000 evil deeds will meet with pestilence or become an outlaw.

A man of 5.000 evil deeds will turn into a ghost in one of the 5 mountain hells.

A man of 6.000 evil deed swill be imprisoned in the 28 hells.

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45. Ducun, "I alone survive," are the powerful words of Guangchengzi in Zhuangzi 27/11/43. This, like Shentong is an expression for the ultimate state of the mystic, the Realized One.

46. Shangqing is the highest heaven of traditional Taoism, and the name of the predominant Taoist sect during the Tang.

47. The six diseases are those caused by Yin (cold), Yang (heat), wind (dizziness), rain (stomach ache), darkness (nervousness), and brightness (heartbeat). They are also called the six excesses and can already be found in Zuozhuan, Zhao 1.

A man of 7.000 evil deeds will be punished in the hells of all directions.
A man of 8.000 evil deeds will end up in the ice hell.
A man of 9.000 evil deeds will go to the deepest hell of the fringes.
A man of 10.000 evil deeds will fall into the hell of the hungry ghost.[48]

"The whole lot of 10.000 evil deeds begins with the karma produced through the three agencies, i.e., the body, speech, and mind. One evil deed leads to the next until as many as the whole 10.000 have been accumulated. Those who then end up in the hell of the hungry ghosts can never expect to be pardoned at all. In the vastness and boundlessness to the very end of heaven, they will never have a chance of liberation. Is this not heartbreaking?

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48. The same passage is quoted in Yunji qiqian 92.6b. The Yunji qiqian is a Taoist encyclopedia of the early Song dynasty found in DZ 1032, fasc. 677-702.

    The 28 hells in Taoism correspond to the 28 dioceses of the Celestial Masters which consist of originally 24 (corresponding to the 24 different breaths of the year) plus 4, thus in alignment with the 28 stations of the moon. For the organization of the Celestial masters see Yunji qiqian 28.

    The cold hells are taken from Buddhism, where altogether there are 8 of them. The hell of the hungry ghosts is, properly speaking, not a hell, but a realm of rebirth.

"Who, however, is aware of the first sign of evil, hastens to straighten it out and does not commit any evil deed is moving closer to the true Tao. If he has already opposed evil, then he should purify his mind, undergo atonements, deeply repent his offenses, and cultivate himself. Only then can one oppose evil and do good. If there is only one single good deed, the mind will be stabilized, the spirit will calm down.
[5a] With 10 good deeds, energy and vigor will grow.
With 100 good deeds, one will find treasures and good omens descending upon oneself.
With 1.000 good deeds, one will be reborn with true spirit.
With 2.000 good deeds, one will become a heavenly attendant with the rank of a Sage, Perfected, or Immortal.
With 3.000 good deeds, one will secure the position of an official with the rank of Sage, Perfected, or Immortal.
With 4.000 good deeds, one will be appointed the heavenly leader of all religious matters on earth, with the rank of Sage, Perfected, or Immortal.
With 5.000 good deeds, one will become a master teacher in Heaven, with the rank of Sage, Perfected, or Immortal.
With 6.000 good deeds, one will be a minister in Heaven with the rank of Sage, Perfected, or Immortal.

With 7.000 good deeds, one will be a heavenly feudal lord with the rank of Sage, Perfected, or Immortal.
With 8.000 good deeds, one will be emperor in Heaven as Sage, Perfected, or Immortal.
With 9.000 good deeds, one will become the Lord of the Five Emperors of Primordial Beginning.
With 10.000 good deeds, one will personally become the Jade Emperor on High."[49]

The Holy Mother Goddess said:

"Good deeds grow from body, speech, and mind. In every single act karma is produced which leads on to another good deed, so that from ten good deeds onward they just multiply spontaneously until ten thousand are reached. Doing a good deed will lead to one's basic emolument in life, whereas doing an evil deed will lead to subtraction from it. Rewarding good and punishing evil is done by specialized heavenly bureaucrats.[50]

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49. The traditional heavenly hierarchy of Taoism included mainly the ranks of Sage, Perfeted, and Immortal. These are first found in chapter 54 of the Nanji shu, especially in Gu Huan's Yixia lun, dat. 470. Another biography of Gu Huan is contained in Nanshu 75. There are altogether 27 ranks in the heavenly hierarchy, 9 each of Sage, Perfected, and Immortal.

50. The heavenly execution of justice can be raced back to Baopuzi 6. The same passage is found also in Yunji qiqian 92.7b. Cf. also Yunji qiqian 89.4a.

According to the logic of karma and retribution, not even the slightest bit is left unaccounted for. The source of long life lies solely in doing good. [5b] Beware! Make strenuous efforts!"

The Holy Mother Goddess said:

"Human beings are born between heaven and earth. Therefore they are endowed with these natural characteristics, every being receives his or her inner nature.

A person of pure energy is clever, alert, wise, and intelligent.

A person of turbid energy is unlucky, harsh, dumb, and foolish.

A person of hard energy is haughty, strong, vigorous, and violent.

A person of soft energy is compassionate, benevolent, honest, and magnanimous.

In the same sense,

a character of the wood-type tends to be energetic and impulsive.

A character of the earth-type tends to be benevolent and harmonious.

A character of the water-type tends to be modest and cautious.

A character of the fire-type tends to be fierce and violent.

A character of the metal-type tends to be severe and abrupt.
Thus everyone's character is shaped according to the forces he receives.[51]

"An intelligent person will restrain and suppress these inborn characteristics and thereby prolong his life span. An ignorant person, however, will licentiously indulge in his desires and thereby only do harm to his inner nature. Inner nature is the source of one's life span. The given life span is the root of one's actual life. One should painstakingly cultivate and carefully refine it. Thus regulate your life to nourish your inner nature, guard the spirit in order to nourish the given life span. In this manner, you will leave suffering behind and ascend to happiness. [6a] Good fortune and blessings will be without bounds.

"All human life comes from spirit. When spirit is preserved there is life, when it disperses, there is death. Concentrated energy turns into essence, concentrated essence turns into spirit. When spirit is concentrated, there will be long life."[52]

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51. Links of human nature with the five agents are already found in the Huainanzi, ch. 3. Within the Taoist context cf. Yunji qiqian 93.

52. This order is the classical order for mystical refinement toward final union with the Tao. Cf. Dingguan jing (DZ 400, fasc. 189; Yunji qiqian 17.6b-13a).

[A similar passage is found in Yunji qiqian 92.7b:

> Concentrating one's essence, nourishing one's spirit and never being confused by beings we call purity. Returning to the spirit, nourishing on breath, being calm and free from agitation, we call tranquility.
>
> One controls one's thoughts in order to stabilize the volition. One calms one's personal body in order to pacify one's spirit. One guards the breath in order to visualize one's essence.
>
> When thoughts and ideas are completely forgotten and one is absorbed in meditation and inner vision, then body and spirit are together. When body and spirit are together, one is coming closer to Realization.]

The Holy Mother Goddess said:

"People usually only know that luxurious feasts are pleasant to their tongues, but they don't realize that rich food is detrimental to their life spans. They only know that nobility and a high status add splendor to their persons, but they don't realize that position and emolument, luxury and extravagance harm themselves.[53]

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53. Cf. Zuowang lun 7b:

> Eating meat and drinking wine, dressing in gauzy cloth and fine silk, having a high personal reputation and an official position, or possessing nice jades and

"This is the reason why the adept of self-cultivation refines his body with the nine cycles of cinnabar elixir and frees himself from all bonds with the help of the five spirits. He guides his energy towards the root of life and expels the destructive forces by way of the three passes. With nine fold refinement and tenfold metamorphosis, the hundred joints will open up and all bondage of the womb will be severed.

"Then one will know original truth. When one knows original truth, one will become an immortal.

-- For immortality, study the mind: When the mind is made conscious, one becomes a immortal.

-- For the Tao, search within: When the within is intimately known, then the Tao will come.

-- For truth, cultivate stillness: Only in all-pervading tranquility one is in harmony with truth.

-- For the spirit, wait for its movements: When movements accumulate, then numinosity will be opened up.

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money are totally superfluous gratifications of passions and desires. The masses hanker after these things and bring death and defeat upon themselves.

See also Yunji qiqian 29.6a and 9a; 31, 1a as well as DZ 1382, fasc. 1043: Shangqing jiudan shanghua taijing zhongji jing.

If one can guard the One without interruption one is moving closer to being a immortal.[54]

[6b] "However, if the mind is filled with strife and the spirit is labored, then the bodily structure will be in distress and not self-subsistent. Activity and rest will loose their essence. Ears and eyes wide open and perceptive (to the outside world), one will in vain hoard things in the attempt to tie the Tao to oneself. The Tao will only be more evasive. If people do not cultivate the Tao, they are in deep delusion. They will sojourn between heaven and earth for very few years.[55]

"On the other hand, who successfully collects and concentrates the energy, strengthens the spirit and in suffering and happiness relies on truth, will in the long run realize the Tao. Once the Tao is perfected such a one will lodge in great non-being as to be the companion of heaven and earth. When he is able to penetrate the void and embody non-being, then together with great non-being, he will reside in pure vastness and stillness, he will be looked at and not seen,

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54. This interesting remark is also found in the biography of Peijun, Yunji qiqian 105.18a.

55. Xisheng jing 2.9b; Zuowang lun 11b-12a:

> Sight and hearing of eyes and ears retain man in imbalance. The joys of the senses must be given up completely.

listened to and not heard. He will mystically have become one with the Tao."[56]

The Holy Mother Goddess said:

"Now, the Tao is the perfect truth of emptiness and pervasion. The practices are the mysterious techniques of change. As the Tao has form, certain practices are used to save humankind. Because people are endowed with numinosity, they can cultivate it and match with the Tao. The more human beings are able to study it, the more the changes become spontaneous for them. The essence of the Tao lies in its depth. Yet it is very simple.[57]

"The secrets of meritorious practices are found in charms, drugs, and energy control. Charms are the numinous scripts of the three numinous bodies. They are pledges of heaven. Drugs are the florescence of the [7a] five agents, the essential fluids of the earth. Energy is the harmony and purity of Yin and Yang, the numinous vital force of all beings. These

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56. "One looks at it and does not see it," and "One listens to it and does not hear it" are the classical descriptions of the nature of the Tao in Daode jing 14.

57. 45 For the role of the philosophy of change in Taoism see Robinet 1979: 37. The description of the Tao as simple is reminiscent of the Tianyinzi (DZ 1026, fasc. 672), section 2. For this text, see Kohn 1987a.

three, i.e., charms, drugs, and energy control, are opportunities central to the attainment of the Tao. They are treasures of every seeker of immortality. Who is able to connect them all will live forever and save innumerable others."

The Holy Mother Goddess said:

"How then can the Tao be carried out and expanded among humanity? Drugs have the potential to refine the bodily form. Charms are powerful to control the spirit. When the spirit returns, the mind will be pervasive. When the bodily form is refined, the energy is stabilized. When the spirit is whole and the energy stable, one's bodily form will be recovered and strengthened. Then the life span will be whole."[58]

"Only when the life span is whole can one proceed to regulate the energy and mutate the essences. Then one penetrates the formless, flies through the void; and goes on living and dying spontaneously. Then one will be forever and in eternity. When someone has realized the Tao, no calamity will reach him at the end of a great kalpa, when heaven and earth tumble.[59] This is the effect of charms and drugs.

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58. Fu; yao; qi; structure of Taoist methods. This section is also quoted in Yunji qiqian 92.6ab.

59. For Taoist ideas on the cyclical ending of the world, cf. Zürcher 1982.

The Holy Mother Goddess said:

"Formerly there were 72 chapters of texts concerning the merit of the holy rules and of metamorphosis as well as concerning the practices of reverting the cinnabar elixir and the golden fluid. Now, however, there are only nine chapters left. They are preserved in three scrolls, of three chapters each. The three chapters of the middle scroll [7b] contains the Scripture of Proper Cinnabar with the five talismans Mysterious Blank, Golden Essence, Flying Charm, Golden Flower, and Three Five and the nine cycles of the cinnabar elixir White Snow, Male and Female, White Flower, Golden Fluid, Cinnabar Flower, Five Colors, Muddy Mercury, Golden Essence, and Nine Tripods.[60] Attaining one of these nine elixirs by reverting the cinnabar will already serve to ensure long life, therefore one need not concoct them all. The Way of Spirit Cinnabar consists of three mutations and five cycles. It is complete when nine is reached.

"When one wants a drug made from plants rather than minerals, one should either dig them into the earth and leave them there until well rotten, or boil them into a porridge, or scorch them by frying. You will ask: How, if these substances are not themselves

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60. There are nine elixirs in Baopuzi 4.6a-7a, but they are not identical with the same listed above. Another source for the nine elixirs is the Huangdi jiuting shendan jing (DZ 884, fasc. 583).

alive, will they ever be able to give life to humanity?[61] But in the Way of the Golden Cinnabar, things are the other way around. Frying intensifies their essence, and boiling enhances their marvelous qualities. Plants treated in the above described fashion will therefore prolong people's lives. Therefore I have sent the Venerable Lord to earth with the mission to refine the cinnabar elixir and show everyone the fundamental principle of cultivating the Tao."

There still is a Cinnabar Well in Bo-zhou.

The Holy Mother Goddess said:

"Even though the nine elixirs are usually powerful, their respective effects depend on one's moral behavior and past karma. A superior person who takes the drug will ascend to heaven and take up a [8a] position in the heavenly hierarchy. One of average standing will establish his residence in the Kunlun paradise. One of inferior merit, however, will just enjoy long life on earth."

The Holy Mother Goddess said:

"Both, the nine cinnabar elixirs and the golden fluid, are paths leading to ascension to heaven. Those who take the nine cinnabar elixirs will become

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61. Baopuzi 4, on the nine elixirs.

officials in the heavenly bureaucracy and will be bodily carried up to heaven by cloudy dragons. Those who take the golden fluid will radiate a golden light from their bodies and rise towards heaven instantaneously. In any case, the spirit elixir will spontaneously come to those who are firmly established in merit and accumulate good deeds. Those who lack in merit and fail to do good can never even hope for immortality. "Formerly I received 1200 secret formulas from the Heavenly Lord of Primodial Beginning. During countless kalpas, I passed them on and saved many beings with them. In the old days I bestowed them on the Perfected and Realized Ones, on the Great Immortal, on the God of Heaven, on the Lord on High, as well a on the Goddesses of Great Tenuity and of the Great One. Moreover, the Dark Female and the Yellow Emperor all realized the Tao.[62]

"The Tao cannot act in emptiness, it needs to be bestowed on humanity.[63] [8b] A person, however, who

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62. In Zhuangzi 16/6/34, there is a long list of mythical deities who all attained the One and were then ranked among the stars. Dedao, realize the Tao, is the title of the last section of the Zuowang lun (p.15a).

63. The Xisheng jing states:

> Spirit functions to give life to shaped things. Without this function, there would be no life... It is only upon

is given to pleasures and passions, whose hearing and seeing are dull and impaired, whose mind is preoccupied with right and wrong -- such a one is like a heavy stone thrown into the river. Once gone, he or she will never come up again. This is very painful, indeed.

"Alas, the Tao is lofty and full of wonders. It is concealed behind the nine mysteries, in a gem-ornamented tower and a cloudy satchel. Only once in ten thousand years is it ever revealed.[64] Only who is in possession of a mysterious register nd who has a jade name will be able to behold the divine scripture. Anyone not naturally given the appropriate destiny and disposition or who suffers in his bodily form will never know a chance to even hear about it."[65]

> borrowing spirit that shaped things can come to life. Spirit uses shaped things as habitation in order to attain perfection. Without the joining of spirit and shaped things, there would be nor life nor perfection (4.14b).

According to this passage, the Tao or spirit needs created things for its realization or perfection. Just as Du Guangting here says: "The Tao cannot act in emptiness."

64. The Tao is revealed only once in 10.000 years, especially according to the doctrine of the Lingbao school.

65. That everyone needs the proper destiny in order to hear about the Tao at all is also mentioned in the Sanyi jiugong fa, Yunji qiqian 50. In addition, it

After the Holy Mother Goddess had finished speaking, immortal officials and spirit attendants arrived with cloudy chariots and feathery canopies. Forest-like they assembled around her. Thereupon she climbed into the chariot of the eight luminaries and ascended to heaven in broad daylight.

The Venerable Lord strode on a white deer and, rising from the top of a cypress, followed the immortal equipage back to the heaven of great Purity. Today one can still see the traces of the deer in the cypress.[66]

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is a standard motif in immortals' biographies. Cf. also Yijing, Xici I.9.

66. The earliest mention of the white deer in connection with Laozi seems to be the Bianhua jing, according to which he was once born on White Deer Mountain (Seidel 1969: 68). The white deer otherwise is known as an auspicious animal (Bohu tong 5.2b).

Du Guangting in his Guangsheng yi interprets Laojun's leaving the world thus:

> He also demonstrates the fact that everyone who practices the wonderful Tao will ascend to heaven. To show his final realization of merits, he climbed on a light carriage and left the world. Today there is still the Cypress of the Deer on the temple ground. This is the very spot where the Venerable Lord strode on the white deer carriage and ascended to heaven (2.13b).

According to another source, the Holy Mother Goddess occupies the most elevated and noble position in the cosmos. She governs heaven and earth and regulates the rhythm of yin and yang. She orders the wind and the rain and keeps the five planets moving. She supplies heat and cold and controls the trigrams Qian and Kun. The three worlds and the host of immortals are her vassals and slaves. Human life and death, [9a] the rise and the decline of the world all depend on her.[67]

Around this cypress several wonderful events happened in the Tang:

> In the year when the holy Tang dynasty received the mandate of heaven, a withered cypress in Bo near Laozi's old home began to blossom anew. Thus the tree was entitled Cypress of New Life (Guangsheng yi 2.14b).

In addition, sometimes "characters would be recognized on the top of the three cypresses" in Zhenyuan.

67. 54 This image of the Mother of the Tao goes back to the description of Yuanjun as Laozi's teacher in the Baopuzi (4.7b):

> Yuanjun is chief of the gods and immortals, and can claim to harmonize yin and yang, and to give orders to ghosts, gods, wind, and rain. He drives nine dragons and twelve white tigers. All the

She acts as the Holy Mother of the Venerable Lord, because she represents the fact that heaven, earth, and the myriad beings all spring from a life-giving source, a root that endows them with sageliness. Therefore she ordered the Goddess of the Great One to bestow the secrets of the cinnabar elixir and the golden fluid onto the world of humanity.[68]

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immortals of the world are his subordinates, ..." (Ware 1966: 79-80).

In the Tang this image survives in the cult to the Mother Goddess as the Great Queen of Before Heaven (cf. Guangsheng yi 2.14a).

68. Taiyi yuanjun is the teaching aspect of the mother goddess. A full biography of her is found in Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian houji (DZ 298, fasc. 150), 1.8b-9a.

LINEAGE OF BASIC TEXTS

QUEEN MAYA

Taizi ruiying benqi jing

MOTHER LI

Shiji, Zhuangzi
Laozi ming
Laozi bianhua jing
Shengmu bei
Daode zhenjing xujue
Shenxian zhuan

JADE MAIDEN OF MYSTERY AND WONDER

Santian neijie jing
Xuanmiao neipian

GODDESS OF THE GREAT ONE

Baopuzi
Daode zhenjing guangsheng yi
Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian houji

GREAT QUEEN OF FORMER HEAVEN

Daode zhenjing guangsheng yi

HOLY MOTHER GODDESS

Yongcheng jixian lu

GLOSSARY

Baopuzi 抱朴子 (Book of the Master Who Embraces Simplicity)

Bohutong 白虎通 (Comprehensive Discussions in the White Tiger Hall)

Bowuzhi 博物志 (Record of Astounding Things)

Chuci 楚辭 (The Songs of the South)

Da Tang tianyan yudie 大唐天演玉牒

Daode jing 道德經

Daode zhenjing guangsheng yi 道德真經廣聖義

Daozang 道藏

Dingguan jing 定觀經 (Scripture on Concentration and Observation)

Gaoshi zhuan 高士傳 (Biographies of Eminent Gentlemen)

Hanshu shihuo zhi 漢書食貨志 (Treatise on Food and Commerce, History of the Han Dynasty)

Hou Hanshu 後漢書 (History of the Later Han Dynasty)

Huahu jing 化胡經 (Scripture of the Conversion of the Barbarians)

Huainanzi 淮南子

Huangdi neijing suwen 黃帝內經素文 (Inner Classic of the Yellow Emperor: Fundamental Questions)

Huangting waijing jing 黃庭外景經 (Outer Yellow Court Scripture of Luminosity)

Laozi bianhua jing 老子變化經 (Scripture of the Transformations of Laozi)

Laozi kaitian jing 老子開天經 (Scripture of Laozi Opening the Cosmos)

Laozi ming 老子銘 (Inscription for Laozi)

Liexian zhuan 列仙傳 (Immortals' Biographies)

Liji 禮記 (Classic of Rites)

Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian houji 歷世真仙體道通鑑後記

Liujia guantai shu 六甲胎息書

Lunheng 論衡

Miaomen youqi 妙門由起

Mohe zhiguan 摩訶止觀

Mu tianzi zhuan 穆天子傳 (Record of Mu, Son of Heaven)

Nanqi shu 南齊書 (History of the Southern Qi Dynasty)

Sandong zhunang 三洞珠囊 (Pearly Bag of the Three Caves)

Santian neijie jing 三天內解經 (Scripture of Esoteric Explication of the Three Heavens)

Shangyuan jing 上元經 (Scripture of Highest Prime)

Shenxian zhuan 神仙傳 (Biographies of Spirit Immortals)

Shiji 史記 (Record of the Historian)

Shuowen 說文

Suishu 隋書 (History of the Sui Dynasty)

Taishang jiudan shanghua taijing zhongji 太上九丹上化胎精中記

Taizi ruiying benqi jing 太子瑞應本起經

Tianyinzi 天隱子

Weimo jing 維摩經 (Vimalakirti nideśa sutra)

Weishu 緯書 (Apocrypha)

Xiaodao lun 笑道論 (The Ridiculous Tao)

Xici 繫辭 (The Great Appendix)

Xisheng jing 西昇經 (Scripture of Western Ascension)

Xiuxing benqi jing 脩行本起經

Xuanmiao neipian 玄妙內篇 (Esoteric Account of Mystery and Wonder)

Xuanmiao yunü yuanjun neizhuan 玄妙玉女元君內傳 (Esoteric Biography of the Goddess Jade Maiden of Mystery and Wonder)

Xuanzhong ji 玄中記 (Record of Mystery and Harmony)

Xujue 序訣 (Introductory Formulas)

Yijing 易經 (Book of Changes)

Yixia lun 夷夏論 (Treatise on Barbarians and Chinese)

Yunji qiqian 雲笈七籤 (Seven Slips from a Cloudy Satchel)

Zhengao 真誥 (Declarations of the Perfected)

Zhouyi cantongqi 周易參同契 (Tally to the Book of Changes)

Zhuangzi 莊子

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Please see next page for Daniel Overmyer.

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** This list will not be perfect. Despite Professor Overmyer's kindness in providing the editors with a complete list of his writings, they were not always able to distinguish from the titles those on Taoism from his many writings on Chinese popular religion and on Buddhism. This list will give the seeker a start; in the future, we will improve on what follows.*

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THERE IS A LIFE

THAT CONSISTS OF A QUANTITY OF ENERGY,

AND THERE IS A LIFE

THAT CONSISTS OF MEANING OF THE TAO.

THE LIFE THAT CONSISTS OF A QUANTITY

OF ENERGY

IS CREATED BY THE UNIVERSE

AND IS CONDITIONED.

THE LIFE THAT CONSISTS OF MEANING

OF THE TAO

CREATES THE UNIVERSE

AND IS PRIMORDIAL.

-- *Liu, I-ming, THE TAOIST I CHING*
translated by Thomas Cleary
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